MVA markets in Busan, Korea to bolster new flights. PAGE 3
DPW aims to complete Phase 2 of road improvement projects by year's end. PAGE 4

Hafa Adai!

$1

Saipan Tribune

5 DAYS BEFORE CHRISTMAS

THE CNMI'S FIRST DAILY NEWSPAPER

Volume XXXIV, Issue No. 254

www.saipantribune.com | FRIDAY DECEMBER 20, 2024 | www.facebook.com/saipantribune

100% TAX ABATEMENT FOR 22 YEARS

CEDA votes in favor of J&P Holdings' QC

KIMBERLY B. ESMORES
The Commonwealth Economic Development Authority deliberates the J&P Holdings qualifying certificate that would allow for the establishment of a new inter-island air service—Micronesian Air Connections Services.

By KIMBERLY B. ESMORES
kimberly_esmores@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

After hours of deliberations, the Commonwealth Economic Development Authority unanimously voted in favor of approving to recommend J&P Holdings' qualifying certificate application which would make way for the company to invest millions into its newly established inter-island airline, Micronesian Air Connection Services. However, the QC is still subject to approval by Gov. Arnold I. Palacios.

See CEDA on Page 4

CNMI mayors establish ANMIM

By RACQUEL H. FLOYD
raxfloyd@gmail.com
CORRESPONDENT

The mayors of Saipan, Tinian, Rota, and the Northern Islands last Wednesday established the Association of the Northern Mariana Islands Mayors in the

See CNMI on Page 4

RACQUEL FLOYD
Members of the Association of the Northern Mariana Islands Mayors, from left, Northern Islands Mayor Valentine Taisakan, Saipan Mayor Ramon "RB" B. Camacho, Rota Mayor Aubry Hocog, and Tinan Mayor Edwin Aldan pose for a photo after their meeting last Wednesday afternoon at the conference room of Saipan Mayor's Office.

Palacios, Senate leaders meet to clarify budget matters

Palacios

Gov. Arnold I. Palacios and Lt. Gov. David M. Apatang met yesterday with representatives of the Senate to clarify misconceptions which were aired on the previous day's Senate session.

Discussion on the floor of the Dec. 18, 2024, Senate session had raised concerns regarding the governor's legal authority under the Planning and

See PALACIOS on Page 4

SHS' Cabrera accepted to WSU veterinary school

SHS
Saipan Humane Society president and co-founder Lauren Cabrera has been accepted to Washington State University's acclaimed veterinary school.

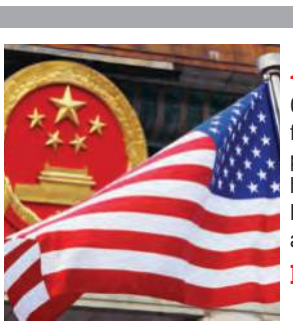
By CHRYSTAL MARINO
chrystal_marino@saipantribune.com
CORRESPONDENT

Fueled by compassion and inspired by the needs of her community, Saipan Humane Society is excited to

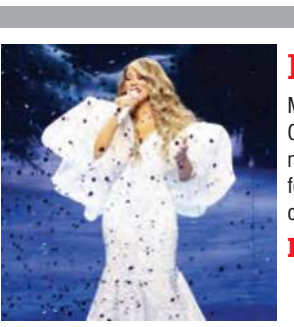
See SHS on Page 4

INSIDE

BUSINESS
United Airlines, the largest U.S. airline serving Taipei from the United States, announced that customers can now book travel between Taipei and Guam for travel beginning in April 2025.
PAGE 15



ASIA
China is expanding its nuclear force, has increased military pressure against Taiwan and has strengthened its ties with Russia over the past year, according to a Pentagon report.
PAGE 17



LIFE & STYLE
Mariah Carey is the Queen of Christmas for a reason—and not just because "All I Want for Christmas Is You" tops the charts seasonally.
PAGE 19

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Local

MVA markets in Busan, Korea to bolster new flights

The Marianas Visitors Authority is stepping up its marketing in Busan, South Korea, as a partner in the launch of new flights from the city beginning today, Dec. 20.

This month, MVA launched television and subway station ads targeting the Busan and Young-nam areas, marketing the twice weekly Busan-Saipan flights. The flights by Jeju Air are jointly chartered by Leaders Tour, Hana Tour, and Micronesia Resort Inc. and will provide over 3,700 additional air seats from Korea through Feb. 25, 2025.

"Airlines provide the means to meet consumer demand for The Marianas destination, and the MVA is investing in marketing and promotions specifically in Busan to help attract more visitors from this major metropolis and fill these seasonal flights," said MVA managing director Christopher A. Concepcion. "In cooperation with our travel partners, we are looking forward to an uptick in arrivals from Korea over the next few months during this high-peak winter travel period."

The MVA has launched 15-second C-TV ads across several channels based on TV viewing patterns and mobile usage data of subscribers. Digital ads have also been placed throughout Seo-Myeon Station, one of the busiest subway stations in the city. In addition, a press release from the MVA announcing the flight launch was carried by 27 media outlets in November, generating an estimated $282,000 in additional unpaid publicity about the flights and The Marianas.

Through its charter flight partners, the MVA is also marketing the flights through social commerce, B2C channels, Kakao Talk APP Push, advertorials, Instagram, blogs, and more. ***(PR)***

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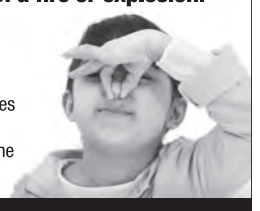

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DPW aims to complete Phase 2 of road improvement projects by year's end

By KIMBERLY B. ESMORES
kimberly_esmores@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

The Department of Public Works says the goal is to complete Phase 2 of its road improvement projects by the end of 2024.

Many have posed the question "when will the road improvements end?" along Beach Road. Many have even raised concerns about the hassle it poses to motorists who use the road daily to get to work.

Fortunately, DPW Secretary Ray Yumul says the goal is to complete the project as early as the end of December.

Phase 2 of DPW's road improvement project encompasses the road from As Perdido to the Atkins Kroll intersection.

Due to uncontrollable circumstances, the road improvement project's completion was pushed back from November to the end of December.

"We had over a month's worth of rain just recently and the contractor started late due to a lack of archeological services. But our goal is to complete all digging and first level paving by the end of the year," he said.

While the brunt of the job is expected to be completed by the end of this year, DPW will still have a second level of paving to lay down the non-skid layer of pavement.

Previously, Yumul encouraged that to further ease up traffic, motorists consider alternate routes like Oleai St. and the street next to Downtown Market if their intent is to go through Middle Road or Chalan Kiya.

"We are encouraging motorists to use other routes to alleviate traffic congestion. There will still be traffic, but our goal is to lessen congestion. DPS will also have officers posted strategically to help with traffic," he said.

SHS

From page 1

announce that their president and founder is embarking on her journey to become a veterinarian.

In a social media post last Wednesday, the clinic shared their congratulations to Lauren Cabrera for her acceptance into Washington State University's acclaimed veterinary school.

Cabrera told *Saipan Tribune* in an interview that, due to admissions being extremely competitive, she had originally applied to several veterinary schools, but Washington State University was her top choice.

"I love WSU's strong connection with the CNMI (Go Cougs!) and felt welcomed by their community. Their recent visit to Saipan, where I learned from their veterinarians and veterinary technicians, further solidified my interest."

Cabrera shared that with only 32 accredited veterinary schools in the U.S., odds were tough as each school were accepting just 100-150 students out of the average of 2,500 applying per school.

"Applicants generally should have a strong GPA, veterinary experience, extracurricular activities, work experience, and letters of recommendation."

Cabrera told *Saipan Tribune* that her application was almost 50 pages long, but in the end, she had received interview invitations from two other schools, and two accepted her application. Cabrera shared that she is waiting for additional responses, and is open to better offers, but right now she is aiming for WSU.

Cabrera shared that one of the main challenges is to being away from her family for so long.

"Becoming a veterinarian takes four years of study after earning a bachelor's degree. It will be challenging to leave my family and attend school, but my husband is incredibly supportive and understands how much this is needed in the community. I would not have made it this far without him cheering me on and our family sacrificing to allow me to do this work."

A longer version of this story is available at www. saipantribune.com

CEDA

From page 1

Yesterday, CEDA held a special board meeting specifically to act on J&P Holdings' application for a qualifying certificate. J&P Holdings essentially needs a qualifying certificate in order to launch its new inter-island air service venture—MACS.

Essentially a qualifying certificate exempts a company from paying local taxes (or a percentage of taxes) for a period of time. In this case, CEDA approved a 100% tax abatement for a span of 22 years (opposed to the initial 25 years J&P Holdings applied for).

While CEDA eventually voted in favor of approving to recommend the QC, it was a long and winding road to get to the conclusion.

When the meeting started at around 9am yesterday morning, CEDA was leaning towardsa 15-year QC that would only provide 100% tax abatement for the first five years before decreasing it gradually to 75%, down to 50% until the QC's expiration.

However, J&P Holdings owner John Stewart and the company's tax attorney, Tina Azarvand, would not budge. The pair argued that CEDA's initial recommendation was just not viable considering the amount of money needed to purchase the fleet of planes needed to service all three islands alone. Not to mention insurance, maintenance, etc. and considering that there are other subsidiaries that continue to lose money in the current economy.

After much back and forth between the board and the applicants, a recess was called to allow a representative from the Division of Tax and Revenue to join the meeting and to allow J&P Holdings to paint a clearer picture of what the projections would be considering other expenses pertaining to the new airline as well as subsidiaries included in the application.

At around 3pm, the meeting reconvened and again, after over an hour of discussion, CEDA management came back with a recommendation of a 20-year abatement at 100% while Tax and Revenue recommended 25 years.

A longer version of this story is available at www. saipantribune.com

CNMI

From page 1

conference room of Saipan Mayor's Office.

ANMIM aims to foster collaboration, unity, and effective governance among the municipalities of the CNMI.

"We, the mayors of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, comprised of the islands of Rota, Tinian, Saipan, and Northern Islands, do hereby establish our Association of the Northern Mariana Islands Mayors, in recognition of our shared commitment to the well-being and progress of our communities, and with the aim of fostering collaboration, unity, and effective governance," stated ANMIM's articles, bylaws, and procedures.

The creation of the ANMIM and its bylaws were reviewed by Tinian Mayor Edwin P. Aldan, who served as chair pro tempore along with Saipan Mayor Ramon "RB" B. Camacho, Rota Mayor Aubry M. Hocog, and Northern Islands Mayor Valentino Taisakan.

The focus of the association is to address common challenges, promote sustainable development, and advocate for constituents' needs.

Collective action for island prosperity with an emphasis on collective action to improve quality of life and preserve cultural heritage, a commitment to transparency, accountability, and inclusivity in governance with a focus on knowledge exchange, unified advocacy, and fostering strong partnerships with government agencies.

The meeting started at a little past 2pm and began with Camacho's motion to remove item No. 5 from the second plenary session of the agenda, "Membership inclusive of Northern Mariana Islands Municipal."

A longer version of this story is available at www. saipantribune.com

PALACIOS

From page 1

Budgeting Act, 1 CMC § 7101 et seq., to lift austerity and restore the full 80-hour pay period for CNMI government employees.

Palacios, Apatang, and Finance Secretary Tracy Norita explained to the Senate attendees, including Senate President Edith DeLeon Guerrero (D-Saipan), floor leader Sen. Corina Magofna (Ind-Saipan), Fiscal Affairs Committee chair Sen. Donald Manglona (Ind-Rota), as well as fiscal analyst Dave Demapan and legal counsel Joe Bermudes, that work hour reductions were lifted for the first quarter of fiscal year 2025 using residual ARPA funds, i.e., outside, non-local sources.

Restoring the full working hours thus did not exceed the governor's budgetary authority over local revenues under Public Law 23-26, the Appropriations and Budget Authority Act of 2025. Further, because allocating these non-local funds did not constitute an increase in available local revenues for the fiscal year, no special message to the Legislature was required under 1 CMC § 7604.

The meeting clarified that governor's Directive 2025-002, which lifted the 10 austerity hours per pay period beginning Nov. 3, 2024, did not constitute an unauthorized appropriation and thus did not violate the Planning and Budgeting Act.

The Palacios-Apatang administration further explained to the Senate that the Commonwealth's issuance of a pension obligation bond to meet its Minimum Annual 1 Payment obligation to the NMI Settlement Fund will free up funds within the general fund to maintain full working hours for the remaining quarters of FY 2025.

A special budget message and proposed revised budget for the fiscal year will be forthcoming to reflect the bond proceeds and planned reallocation of funds from the Settlement Fund to government operations.

The administration also reiterated its concern at press reportage that paints efforts at fiscal responsibility and restoring the community's livelihood as improper. Troublingly, the local papers, without having reached out to the Office of the Governor for comment, printed inaccurate allegations from the Senate session that the Governor's directive violated Commonwealth law. The meeting stressed the importance of factual accuracy regarding the administration's effort to restore fiscal transparency and accountability. ***(PR)***

DIVISION OF PROCUREMENT SERVICES
CNMI GOVERNMENT

NOTICE TO ALL CNMI GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES

THIS NOTICE SHALL SERVE AS AN OFFICIAL COMMUNICATION TO ALL GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES.

The Division of Procurement Services ("Procurement'), looks to advise all Government Offices and Instrumentalities of the need to ensure that full, fair, and open competition exists for all goods and services obtained by the Government, as provided for in Title 70 of the CNMI Administrative Code.

Under Part 700 of the CNMI Procurement Regulations, the Code of Conduct outlines the expectations from all government employees who engage in the expensing of funds to meet a public purpose. This part also identifies that:

- Any attempt to achieve personal gain through public employment is a breach of that public trust. **(§ 70-30.3-710(a))**
- Employees are required to disclose in writing to the Director of Procurement Services any benefit or financial interest from a governmental contract, including any known or potential conflict of interest. **(§ 70-30.3-710(b))**
- It is a breach of ethical standards for government employees to receive any offer, gift, gratuity or kickback that may influence the decision, approval, disapproval, or recommendation, related to the procurement, contract, or subcontract of services or items.

Procurement regulations and rules are established to protect government employees and organizations. When using public funds (local or federal), it is the responsibility of Procurement Services to ensure that purchase orders and contracts are entered for a public purpose and do not constitute waste, fraud, or abuse of public funds. Employees who circumvent or do not follow the rules or procedures for the procurement of goods and services may be personally and/or criminally liable for breach of ethical standards. To the extent that violations of the ethical standards of conduct set forth in this Part constitute violations of Commonwealth law, they are punishable as provided for therein.

CNMI Government Employees are hereby given notice that as a steward of public funds, it is your responsibility to ensure that funds expended by the Government achieve a Public Purpose as defined in CNMI Public Law

DIVISION OF PROCUREMENT SERVICES
CNMI GOVERNMENT

NOTICE TO CNMI GOVERNMENT VENDORS

THIS NOTICE SHALL SERVE AS AN OFFICIAL COMMUNICATION TO ALL GOVERNMENT VENDORS.

All vendors must comply with the CNMI Procurement Regulations as provided for in the Northern Mariana Islands Administrative Code (NMIAC). This means that no services or goods can be obtained, and a vendor should not make any attempts to do so, until such time a fully executed contract or approved purchase order is in place. The Government is not liable for any work conducted prior to receiving a fully executed contract or purchase order. Expenses borne outside of normal procedures are the personal responsibility of the Employees and the Government is not liable for any payments accrued outside Procurement Regulations.

Additionally, the Division takes this opportunity to apprise and remind all new/existing CNMI Government Vendors that:

- Construction projects where costs exceed $25,000.00 will require a performance bond. Failure to obtain a performance bond will result in a disqualified bid.
- Procurement reserves the right to impose bonding requirements on goods and/or services where a risk to the Government exists.
- When delivering goods to Procurement, ensure a copy of the Invoice and Purchase Order are accompanied with the items.
- Change Orders are a tool used to make any alterations to existing terms between the Government and a vendor. As a reminder, any abuse of this mechanism will not be entertained and the Government will not be liable for any work done outside an approved change order. Vendors are reminded that the Government is under no obligation to pay for expenses that did not undergo normal acquisition procedures.
- Pay attention to deadlines: Contract Lifespans are provided for under "Duration of Contract" within the CNMI Government Contract. Purchase Orders approved within a fiscal year are only valid for that fiscal year, unless provided for otherwise.
- Ratifications: Any expenses where a fully executed contract or approved purchase order is NOT in place, is an expense liable by the Government Employee in a personal capacity. Ratifications are dealt with on a case-by-case basis and there are no guarantees that a ratification will be approved by any Government authority involved in the process. As such, Vendors are once again reminded that no work should be done outside a fully executed contract or approved purchase order.

Willie Tan recognized for generous Thanksgiving donations

By JERCY DIANA MAXIMO
jercymaximo05@gmail.com
CORRESPONDENT

Last Dec. 6, at Herman's Modern Bakery along Airport Road, community leaders gathered to honor Willie Tan for his unwavering support of families in need across the CNMI during Thanksgiving. Tan's efforts, which span a solid decade, have provided thousands of meals to deserving families, ensuring that the holiday season is celebrated with warmth and gratitude.

Rota Mayor Aubry Manglona Hocog expressed her heartfelt appreciation for Tan's contributions. She emphasized how significant these meals are to the families on the island, stating, "Turkey, mashed potatoes, that's like a luxury, because that's not what's normally served… From the bottom of our hearts, thank you for your kindness and your generosity. Thank you so much."

Tinian Mayor Edwin P. Aldan also spoke about Tan's impact, recognizing how the initiative has grown over the years to include Tinian families. "I want to present to you our deepest appreciation… The spirit of giving has profoundly impacted many, many lives," Aldan shared during his speech.

Businessman Juan Pan reflected on Tan's long-standing dedication. "For a solid 10 years, Willie Tan contributed to fund meals for families on Saipan, and the last three years, he has included Tinian and Rota. This year, he personally funded more than 1,500 meals to families and friends through Thanksgiving, with the support of Herman's Modern Bakery."

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Rota Mayor Aubry Hocog and Tinian Mayor Edwin P. Aldan pose with Willie Tan, Juan Pan Guerrero of Herman's Modern Bakery, and a representative from Star Marianas Air, Inc. after they were given plaques of appreciation for providing Thanksgiving meals for Rota and Tinian residents throughout the years.

Plaques of appreciation were presented to Willie Tan, Herman's Modern Bakery, and Star Marianas Air, Inc. for their contributions to the program.

When asked about his motivation, Tan humbly remarked, "I am just happy doing it."

The gathering not only celebrated Tan's generosity but also underscored the spirit of compassion and community support that has become a hallmark of the CNMI's Thanksgiving tradition.

Judiciary limited hours of operation on Dec. 24, 31

BY FERDIE DE LA TORRE

CNMI Judiciary Building

The Supreme Court said the Judiciary closed its facilities from 12pm to 5pm on Dec. 24, 2024 (Christmas Eve) and Dec. 31, 2024 (New Year's Eve).

E-filing portals (File and ServeXpress, eRecording, and eCourt) will remain open during the holidays. Bail, family protection, emergency, and time-sensitive matters may be set consistent with applicable rules. Judiciary personnel may be activated for emergency and essential services.

Please visit the Judiciary's website at www.NMIJudiciary.gov for court information. For additional information or inquiries, contact: Supreme Court clerks of court Judy T. Aldan at (670) 236-9716 and judy.aldan@NMIJudiciary.gov or Patrick V. Diaz at (670) 236-9783 and patrick.diaz@NMIJudiciary.gov or supreme.court@NMIJudiciary.gov. ***(PR)***

SAIPAN HIGHER EDUCATION FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE
Office of the Mayor
Municipality of Saipan

NOTICE OF REGULAR SHEFA BOARD MEETING

In accordance with 1 CMC § 9901 et seq., as amended, the Saipan Higher Education Financial Assistance (SHEFA) Board is hereby giving notice of its regular board meeting, to be held on December 20th, 2024, at 3:00 pm, Office of SHEFA conference room, 2nd Floor, CTC Building, Oleai, Beach Road, Saipan.

AGENDA

I. Preliminary Matters
1. Call to Order
2. Roll Call
3. Adoption of Agenda
4. Adoption of Minutes from November 18th, 2024

II. Public Comment (s)

III. Committee Reports
a. Committee on Awards
b. Committee on Appeal/Deferments/Forbearance
c. Committee on Policy and Procedures
d. Committee on Program and Development
e. Committee of Fiscal, Legislative, and Community Affairs

IV. Administrator's Report

V. Chairwoman's Report

VI. Old Business
1. None

VII. New Business
1. Spring 2025 Application Status

VIII. Executive Session

IX. Miscellaneous Matters

X. Next Meeting

XI. Adjournment

/s/ Ms. Kaelani B. Demapan- Chairwoman, Board of SHEFA Directors

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MHS Glee Club to hold 'A Not-So-Silent Night' concert

By RACQUEL H. FLOYD
raxfloyd@gmail.com
CORRESPONDENT

The Marianas High School Glee Club under the production of Rhythm 'N Harmony will hold "A Not-So Silent Night" concert this Saturday at the MHS cafeteria in Susupe.

The concert is under the direction of student director and MHS Glee Club president Alyana Rotap with Alyrose Santos as co-director and Harold Easton as advisor.

The MHS Glee Club was formed in 2010 as a 16-member competition group. They adopted the performance name Rhythm 'N Harmony in their second year. It is composed of 16 members and is an alumni- and student-directed group after being directed and inspired for a number of years by Paul Dujua who has left the CNMI.

The chorale group achieved a gold medal for 12 consecutive years at the Tumon Bay Musical Festival and has won the judges' choice for the Best High School Choral Group eight times as well as a six-time awardee of the prestigious overall festival sweepstakes.

The group's previous performances included appearances at Guam schools and participation in the International Thespian Festival before COVID-19 held in Lincoln, Nebraska.

These past two years they performed again in that capacity returning to the festival now held in Bloomington Indiana. Rhythm 'N Harmony competes in Group Musical Theatre. The group has received nine superior ratings and two excellent ratings and was ranked second in the nation in 2012. For each of the six years before the COVID-19 hiatus, the group brought back the top trophy from ITF's "Festival Got Talent" competition with the hope of being reinstated this year.

The group's community service includes local performances and participation in various musical productions as the group has been featured in many CNMI local events such as Bridge Capital's CNMI Got Talent (multiple prize winner), has performed the CNMI's national anthems in various venues and for various organizations, and has presented numerous other seasonal and celebratory performances.

The Rhythm 'N Harmony has organized many concerts showcasing modern music and dance and among its additional accomplishments, members have portrayed significant roles in Jonathan Larson's "Rent," Stephen Sondheim's "Into the Woods," Marc Sheiman and Scott Wittman's "Hairspray," and other musical reviews produced by Friends of the Arts.

The group has also staged numerous concerts featuring contemporary music and dance as they aim to inspire and entertain the community, while also discovering new talents.

The production focuses on developing well-rounded performers through artistic expression.

The ticket price for "A Not-So Silent Night" is $5 for students and $10 for adults. Doors open at 6pm.

The Friends of the Arts presents 'A Christmas Special'

The Friends of the Arts Youth Theatre is presenting a Christmas Special program on Dec. 23. This Christmas Special begins at 7pm. The event will be held in the Theatre wing of the Marianas High School Main Cafeteria.

The Christmas Special program features a special version of "A Charlie Brown Christmas," the Hopwood Middle School Glee Club, and the Marianas High School Chorale.

As is the tradition for our Christmas productions, the Friends of the Arts will also collect food items. This year the FOA will support the Salvation Army's Christmas Food Drive. A box will be provided for can goods and other unopened food containers.

You and your family are invited to come and enjoy this fun-fille, just-before-Christmas evening, featuring many of our community's young singers, performers and designers.

Entrance to the Christmas Special is by donation. Your contributions will assist the Friends of the Arts in its sponsorship of classical pianist Roman Rudnytsky's annual appearance and school tours in the CNMI this coming March 2025. ***(PR)***

COMMONWEALTH PORTS AUTHORITY
CNMI GOVERNMENT

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

PROJECT NO. CPA-RFP-009-25
SUBMISSION DATE: JANUARY 14, 2025 (4:00 P.M.)

"AIRPORT BUSINESS AND FINANCE CONSULTANT"

THE BID PACKAGE AND OTHER CONTRACT CONSIDERATIONS IS AVAILABLE FOR PICK UP BEGINNING DECEMBER 13, 2024 AT THE ACCOUNTING DEPARTMENT, COMMONWEALTH PORTS AUTHORITY, 2ND FLOOR, DEPARTURE BUILDING, FRANCISCO C. ADA/SAIPAN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT UPON PAYMENT OF AN ADMINISTRATIVE FEE OF $100. PAYMENT SHALL BE MADE IN CASH, CASHIER'S CHECK, CREDIT CARD, OR U.S. POSTAL MONEY ORDER. ALL APPLICANTS SHALL PAY THE $100.00 TO RECEIVE A COPY OF THE BID.

BIDDERS ARE TO SUBMIT ONE (1) ORIGINAL AND TWO (2) COPIES IN A SEALED ENVELOPE AND MARKED "AIRPORT BUSINESS AND FINANCE CONSULTANT (RFP-009-25)" TO THE OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, 2ND FLOOR, ARRIVAL BUILDING, FRANCISCO C. ADA/SAIPAN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT ON OR BEFORE 4:00 P.M., JANUARY 14, 2025. BIDDERS SHALL TAKE INTO CONSIDERATIONS ALL CHARGES ASSOCIATED WITH THIS PROCUREMENT BEFORE FINALIZING ITS BID PRICE.

THE PROVISIONS OF THE CPA PROCUREMENT REGULATIONS, NMIAC SECTION §40-50-1020 AND 1025 PROHIBITING GRATUITIES, KICKBACKS AND CONTINGENT FEES SHALL APPLY.

THE CPA RESERVES THE RIGHT TO REJECT ANY AND ALL BIDS, AND WAIVE IMMATERIAL DEFECTS IF TO DO SO WOULD BE IN THE BEST INTEREST OF CPA.

FREDERICK PANGELINAN
ACTING EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

DATE: DECEMBER 13, 2024

DIVISION OF PROCUREMENT SERVICES
CNMI GOVERNMENT

INVITATION TO BID
ITB25-DCCA/DYS-42500023

SUBMISSION DATE: JANUARY 13, 2025 TIME: 09:30 A.M.

"PURCHASE OF ONE (1) CLASS "J" VEHICLE FOR DCCA, DIVISION OF YOUTH SERVICES, SAIPAN"

COPIES OF THE SPECIFICATIONS MAY BE OBTAINED ON THE MUNIS VENDOR ACCESS PORTAL AT (https://selfservice.dof.gov.mp/vss/) OR AT THE OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR OF PROCUREMENT SERVICES, LOCATED AT BUILDING NO. 12386, ASCENCION DRIVE, CAPITOL HILL, SAIPAN, DURING REGULAR WORKING HOURS.

FOR ANY **QUESTIONS** REGARDING THIS ITB, PLEASE CONTACT VIVIAN T. SABLAN, DYS ADMINISTRATOR, VIA EMAIL AT vtsablan@dys.gov.mp BY **4:30 P.M., ChST., JANUARY 06, 2025.**

THE PROVISIONS OF THE CNMI PROCUREMENT REGULATIONS, NMIAC SECTION 70-30.3-725 AND 70-30.3-730 PROHIBITING GRATUITIES, KICKBACKS AND CONTINGENT FEES SHALL APPLY.

THE CNMI GOVERNMENT RESERVES THE RIGHT TO REJECT ANY OR ALL BIDS, OR PORTIONS THEREOF, AND WAIVE IMMATERIAL DEFECTS IF TO DO SO WOULD BE IN THE BEST INTEREST OF THE CNMI GOVERNMENT.

/S/ Francisco M. Rabauliman
SECRETARY, DCCA

/S/ Brien S. Nicholas, Jr.
ACTING DIRECTOR, PS

COMMONWEALTH PORTS AUTHORITY
Main Office: SAIPAN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT
2nd Floor Arrival Bldg.
P.O. BOX 501055 • SAIPAN • MP 96950
Phone: (670) 237-6500/1 • Fax: (670) 234-5962
Website: www.cnmiports.com

REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATION STATEMENTS

FRANCISCO C. ADA/SAIPAN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT
RUNWAY REHABILITATION REPACKAGING PROJECT
PROJECT NO. CPA-SA-004-20 (AIP PENDING)

REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATION STATEMENTS
FOR
SAFETY RISK MANAGEMENT FACILITATOR

The Commonwealth Ports Authority (CPA) is a public corporation and autonomous agency of the Government of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). In accordance with its Procurement Rules and Regulations, CPA is seeking statements of qualifications from qualified and experienced firms (individually or collectively) to provide professional consulting services for Safety Risk Management (SRM) facilitation support, in conjunction with the upcoming Francisco C. Ada/Saipan International Airport Runway Rehabilitation Repackaging Project, No. CPA-SA-004-20 (AIP pending).

The project is being funded by U.S. Federal Aviation Administration and is in accordance and compliance with CPA's Procurement Rules and Regulations, Section 40-50-202, Architect-Engineer Design and Construction Management Services.

The Request for Qualification (RFQ) Package is available at CPA's Administration Office, 2nd floor of the arrival terminal at the Francisco C. Ada/Saipan International Airport. No fee is required for obtaining the RFQ package. Electronic copies may be made available upon written request to Ms. Wendi Prater, CPA's CIP Administrator, at wprater@cnmiports.com.

Questions regarding this solicitation must be submitted to Ms. Wendi L. Prater via the email address above or may be hand delivered to the CPA Administration Office by no later than 5:00 p.m. CHST, Friday, December 13, 2024.

The statements of professional qualification will be evaluated based on the criteria available in the RFQ package.

Interested Consultants are requested to submit one (1) original, four (4) copies and one (1) electronic version in .pdf of their statements of professional qualifications no later than **5:00 p.m. CHST, FRIDAY, DECEMBER 27, 2024.** It is preferable that statements of qualification be presented by a combination of both brochures and the use of current U.S. Government Standard Form 330.

The CPA reserves the right to reject any or all statements of professional qualification for any reason, if in its sole opinion to do so would be in its best interest.

/s/ LEO B. TUDELA
Executive Director

Date: November 15, 2024

COMMONWEALTH PORTS AUTHORITY
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Main Office: SAIPAN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT, 2nd Floor Arrival Bldg.
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Website: www.cnmiports.com

INVITATION FOR BID
PROJECT NO. CPA-IFB-012-24-(REPACKAGED)

SUBMISSION DATE: DECEMBER 27, 2024: 2:00 P.M.

"SUPPLY AND DELIVERY OF ONE (1) BRAND NEW 2X4 PICK-UP TRUCK TO THE BENJAMIN TAISACAN MANGLONA ROTA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT"

THE BID PACKAGE IS AVAILABLE FOR PICK UP BEGINNING NOVEMBER 27, 2024 AT THE ACCOUNTING DEPARTMENT, COMMONWEALTH PORTS AUTHORITY, 2ND FLOOR, DEPARTURE BUILDING, SAIPAN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT UPON PAYMENT OF AN ADMINISTRATIVE FEE OF $100. PAYMENT SHALL BE MADE IN CASH, CASHIER'S CHECK, CREDIT CARD, OR U.S. POSTAL MONEY ORDER. ALL APPLICANTS SHALL PAY THE $100.00 TO RECEIVE A COPY OF THE BID.

BIDDERS ARE TO SUBMIT ONE (1) ORIGINAL AND TWO (2) COPIES IN A SEALED ENVELOPE AND MARKED "SUPPLY & DELIVERY OF ONE (1) BRAND NEW 2X4 PICK-UP TRUCK TO THE BENJAMIN TAISACAN MANGLONA ROTA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT **(IFB-012-24-REPACKAGED)**" TO THE OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, 2ND FLOOR, ARRIVAL BUILDING, SAIPAN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT ON OR **BEFORE 2:00 P.M., DECEMBER 27, 2024. A 10% BID BOND OR CASHIER'S CHECK PAYABLE TO CPA SHALL BE SUBMITTED WITH THE BID DOCUMENTS.** BIDDERS SHALL TAKE INTO CONSIDERATIONS ALL CHARGES ASSOCIATED WITH THIS PROCUREMENT BEFORE FINALIZING ITS BID PRICE.

THE PROVISIONS OF THE CPA PROCUREMENT REGULATIONS, NMIAC SECTION §40-50-1020 AND 1025 PROHIBITING GRATUITIES, KICKBACKS AND CONTINGENT FEES SHALL APPLY.

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FREDERICK PANGELINAN
ACTING EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

DATE: _____

NMC campuses closed Dec. 23-Jan. 3

Northern Marianas College campuses on Saipan, Tinian, and Rota will be closed (with few exceptions) from Dec. 23, 2024 to Jan. 3, 2025. All offices will reopen on Jan. 6, 2025.

Spring 2025 registration

New students: Northern Marianas College continues to welcome new students who would like to pursue their college degrees. The deadline to submit a completed application for the upcoming Spring 2025 semester is Jan. 10, 2025. New and readmitted students may apply for admission by visiting www.marianas.edu/apply.

Ongoing (current) NMC students who have earned 13 or more credits can continue to register for the Spring 2025 semester without academic advising by accessing their ProaPortal accounts.

All students can register for Spring 2025 classes on their ProaPortal accounts through Jan. 17, 2025. Students will also be able to make changes to their schedule during "add and drop" week from Jan. 21-24, 2025, but course selection may be limited during this period.

More information about NMC's Spring 2025 semester can be found at www.marianas.edu.

Finance office

Note that NMC's Financial Services Department will be open to support all programs inclusive of grant-funded programs, reports, construction activities, and other administrative obligations. If additional assistance is needed, email david.attao@marianas.edu.

CNMI Small Business Development Center

The CNMI SBDC Office staff will remain open by providing consultations and other SBDC services virtually. For other general inquiries, email cnmisbdc@marianas.edu or call (670) 237-6888. ***(PR)***

A longer version of this story is available at www. saipantribune.com

Saipan PACT Act Registration and Community Call event next month

HONOLULU, Hawaii—VA Pacific Islands Health Care System (VAPIHCS) will hold a PACT Act Registration and Community Call event at the Gov. Pedro P. Tenorio Multi-Purpose Civic Center in Susupe. The event will take place at the following days and times:

- 12pm-4pm (ChST) Wednesday, Jan. 8, 2024.
- 8am-4pm (ChST) Thursday, Jan. 9, 2024.
- 8am-4pm (ChST) Friday, Jan. 10, 2024.

The event will have member service representatives ready to enroll veterans who have never enrolled or those who have become newly eligible under the PACT Act. Veterans who are already enrolled may also come for health services such as diabetic foot checks, vaccines, and blood pressure checks. All veterans can come with health and benefits questions.

The PACT (Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics) Act is a historic new law that will help VA deliver for millions of veterans—and their spouses or survivors—by empowering us to presumptively provide care and benefits to veterans suffering from more than 20 toxic exposure-related conditions. It will also bring generations of service members into VA health care, which will improve veteran health outcomes across the board. We are implementing the PACT Act now to deliver care and services for toxic-exposed veterans and their survivors. If you think you might be eligible for PACT Act benefits, here's what you need to know:

- You can apply for PACT Act-related benefits now by filing a claim.
- You can learn more about the PACT Act by visiting VA.gov/PACT or calling 1-800-MY-VA-411

"We are excited to offer PACT Act enrollment and health services to our Veterans," said Dr. Adam Robinson, director VAPIHCS. "If you aren't sure if you are eligible for VA services, please come and see us. We'll help you access the benefits that you have earned and deserve."

VAPIHCS will continue to make PACT Act enrollment a priority, as well as other community outreach events for those who are unable to come to one of our locations. For more information regarding VA health care in the pacific call: 1-800-MY-VA-411 1-800-698-2411. ***(PR)***

PROCUREMENT SERVICES
CNMI GOVERNMENT
INVITATION TO BID

ITB NO.: ITB25-BECQ/DEQ-42500026

SUBMISSION DATE: JANUARY 21, 2025 TIME: 9:30 A.M.

"PURCHASE OF ONE (1) CLASS "I" VEHICLE FOR THE BECQ-DEQ SAFE DRINKING WATER PROGRAM"

COPIES OF THE SPECIFICATIONS MAY BE OBTAINED ON THE MUNIS VENDOR ACCESS PORTAL (https://selfservice.dof.gov.mp/vss/) OR AT THE OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR OF PROCUREMENT SERVICES, LOCATED AT BLDG. NO. 12386 ASCENCION DRIVE, CAPITOL HILL, SAIPAN, DURING REGULAR WORKING HOURS.

QUESTIONS REGARDING THIS ITB CAN BE MADE TO MS. RIKKI CAMACHO, FEDERAL GRANTS COORDINATOR VIA EMAIL AT RIKKI.CAMACHO@BECQ.GOV.MP BY JANUARY 09, 2025, BY 4:30 P.M, ChST.

THE PROVISIONS OF THE CNMI PROCUREMENT REGULATIONS, NMIAC SECTION 70-30.3-725 AND 70-30.3-730 PROHIBITING GRATUITIES, KICKBACKS AND CONTINGENT FEES SHALL APPLY.

THE CNMI GOVERNMENT RESERVES THE RIGHT TO REJECT ANY OR ALL BIDS, OR PORTIONS THEREOF, AND WAIVE IMMATERIAL DEFECTS IF TO DO SO WOULD BE IN THE BEST INTEREST OF THE CNMI GOVERNMENT.

/S/ FLOYD MASGA
ACTING ADMINISTRATOR, BECQ

/S/ BRIEN S. NICHOLAS JR.
ACTING DIRECTOR, P.S.

NOTICE OF CLOSURE
CGD EASY CASH PAWNSHOP

PLEASE BE INFORMED that effective March 14, 2025, our business operations with cease. Please visit our location so we can assist you with your pawned items.

Thank you for your patronage.

Consumer's Gold Dealer
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Opinion

Hafa Adai!
Saipan Tribune
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Mark Rabago EDITOR
mark_rabago@saipantribune.com

MEMBER

The Associated Press | Pacific Islands News Association

EDITORIAL

Texas attacks NY law: Attorney General Ken Paxton must fail in going after New York doc for abortion pills

Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton, the once-indicted and once-impeached attack dog for right-wing causes, is trying to use the courts to impose his state's harsh abortion limits elsewhere with his specious state lawsuit against New Paltz Dr. Margaret Daley Carpenter for prescribing and sending abortion medications to a woman in Texas. He needs to lose this case.

Paxton's suit conflicts with New York law, which shields doctors from out-of-state prosecution and civil action for actions that are legal in New York. The case is likely to end up in federal court, where it will shape how abortion care—which is now mainly conducted through these medications—can continue nationwide.

Paxton's contention is at least in part that Carpenter is practicing medicine in Texas, but she's obviously not. She is licensed by and practicing here, and the act of having sent a prescription for a legal drug does not change that. This is an attempt by Texas to simply impose its laws on New York and put our doctors at risk for engaging in their profession, plus sending a chilling message to medical practitioners around the country.

It's worth noting, of course, that even the Supreme Court's tortured logic in its politicized overturning of Roe v. Wade, it purported to want to leave this question to state determinations. New York permits abortions, and it permits our doctors to provide this care to women who need it.

But having state, rather federal, oversight was never really the goal of the anti-abortion movement. They want abortion banned, everywhere. They want to extend Texas law into New York and other states, so the lowest common denominator state's laws to be controlling nationwide. That's evident not just by this effort but by efforts to have interstate travel for the purposes of obtaining abortion care also be prohibited, and the people involved criminally prosecuted.

States do, of course, get to make their own laws, some of which impact what people can and can't do elsewhere. You cannot, for example, purchase legal marijuana in another state and have it shipped to yours, where is it not permitted. In that case, however, we're talking about what is still a federally banned drug that can't be sent in the mail. However, the abortion drugs at issue have long been FDA approved and are legal in every state, including Texas.

Without safe abortion access, the alternative, as it's always been, is that women and girls will either not get the care they need and suffer the potential for complications and be forced to carry pregnancies to term, or else attempt to secure abortions that are much less safe for all involved. Paxton and his allies seem much less concerned about the actual health of the women involved than they do with the ideological principle of abortion restriction.

In the age of telemedicine, what else could be prohibited in such a manner? Do states get to decide that certain types of counseling—for example, counseling that specifically serves LGBTQ youth—is unlawful under state law and bar people from receiving it in-state, even if their provider is elsewhere? This is a slippery road that can have repercussions on the practice of medicine around the country. Let's hope the judges agree.

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WHAT'S NEXT?
I'M GOING ACROSS THE STREET FOR A CUP OF COFFEE.
I'LL ALERT YOUR SECURITY DETAIL.
CEO
LAS VEGAS SUN-ZOZA
MIKE SMITH
DIST. BY KING FEATURES SYNDICATE/NIAS

What will the military do if Trump gives unconstitutional orders?

By ML CAVANAUGH
Los Angeles Times

ML Cavanaugh recently retired after 25 years in the U.S. Army. He co-founded the Modern War Institute at West Point.

Every American in the armed forces, and any veteran who has served, hopes and prays for peace and stability under the recently reelected, incoming commander in chief. Political leanings are no factor here. We salute and serve because that's who we are—even as our oaths may soon be tested as the next frontline in the war for America's soul.

Everyone in the military takes an oath to "support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic." Enlisted service members also swear to "obey the orders of the President of the United States and the orders of the officers appointed over me, according to regulations and the Uniform Code of Military Justice." Given Donald Trump's threats to use the military against his own enemies, some wonder with dread: What will the military do if the president gives unconstitutional orders? While nobody would ever want such a challenge, I am fully confident that Americans in uniform will honor the highest duty we swore, which is to the Constitution.

My introduction to the oath came at West Point, when a Vietnam War veteran and professor put it to me straight: "Just who do you want to be? An employee? Or a professional, self-abnegating servant of the nation?" It was an admonition and expectation that, decades on, may be the most consistent North Star I've known. I fought with better men than me who died in Iraq, I spent years and years overseas missing birthdays and everydays with my young daughters, and my final act in uniform was to give away a kidney at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center. I wouldn't have done those things if I hadn't meant the words spoken at my commissioning ceremony, pledging my "true faith and allegiance," which means more to me than my next breath even now that I've retired from active service.

I'm not alone. Millions of others put that same oath at the center of their lives. I liken it to a baptism; instead of joining a faith community, we pledge our lives to the ideals of the United States.

These aren't just words. They're practical; they're our common ground regardless of where we're from or what political differences we might have. They build trust for cohesion to function amid terrifying and violent circumstances. And these oaths that power American national security will likely be tested in coming years.

During his first administration, Trump threatened use of the Insurrection Act (of 1807). At one point he suggested the military should shoot protesters in the legs, which clearly would have been illegal. More recently, he's said he would invoke the Alien Enemies Act (of 1798) and may use the military to detain and deport noncitizens. If either order came to pass—for the 1st Armored Division to roll into Cincinnati or the 82nd Airborne to drop on D.C.—it would immediately pose a can't-fail test for the American military.

What will the troops do? Must members of the U.S. military blindly obey their commander in chief? Or should these individuals always defy orders they consider unconstitutional?

Unfortunately, the answers aren't straightforward.

The U.S. military oaths counsel thoughtful loyalty, not unthinking fealty—and the law treats each troop as responsible for making the right choice. There's no respondeat superior ("let the master answer"), no "just following orders" defense, a principle discredited since World War II when the international community held middlemen and foot soldiers responsible for their war crimes that were ordered by Nazi commanders. Thus the military's first duty is to obey legal orders (and disobey illegal orders). Our generals and JAGs (military lawyers) must lead the institution through the ethical minefields ahead. They, and everyone in camo, must stand their moral ground with courage indistinguishable from the battlefield. Because their oaths expect they "should be prepared not only to die for [their] country, but to be fired for it," in the words of John Silber.

There's another bedrock obligation for military members, a principle that has made the uniformed services among the last remaining trusted institutions in the nation. To preserve American democracy as it exists, the armed forces must always remain politically neutral and not side with any politician or party. This is where things get even messier.

If a president ordered the military to shoot protesters, or to become substantially involved with wholesale domestic detentions, what the military must do—obey or defy—depends heavily on the situation's specifics and any actual violent threat. To issue an advisory opinion without that context would be malpractice. The world is as gray and complex as our oaths are pure and simple.

Because there could be constitutional circumstances for military engagement on U.S. soil. We just can't know yet whether controversial orders will come, and if so what the situation will be.

What we can know is that the U.S. military is a house with good bones. It's an institution that's prepared for dire circumstances like these for quite some time. A century ago, a chaplain at West Point penned the "Cadet Prayer," which advises: "Make us to choose the harder right instead of the easier wrong."

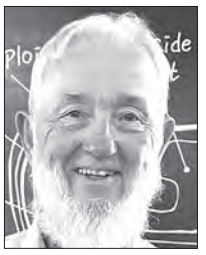
Let's hope that our next president does not attempt to abuse his authority as commander in chief. But if he does, Americans in uniform will choose the harder right—so help us God.

Between the immensities: Nostalgic news, Christmas, cattle views

LITERARY NOOK

By JOEY CONNOLLY
Special to the Saipan Tribune

Joey Connolly aka "Pepe Batbon" is a retired educator who taught in the CNMI, NOLA, and LVNV. He is the Poet Laureate of Tinian and enjoys stargazing.



Chamorro Christmas Acrostic

(in Saipan Tribune 12/22/2017)

M – mampos mafute misan tatalo puengi
E – enkanto esperansa
R – rai yan raina
R – roskas yan bukayu
Y – yetnu yan yenta

C – chikulati yan chiku
H – hagon suni yan hangon
R – rodo manok yan Tres Reyes
I – ilotes yan inaflitu na manok
S – satditnas yan satmon
T – titiyas yan tinaktak
M – mampos meyas
A – afá maolek, adobo, adibina
S – sopa suni

The next poem should be of interest to the Tinian Cattleman's Association, Gil Borja, Jose Dela Cruz, and other lancheru in Luta, Tinian, yan Saipan. It was written by Luisa A. Igloria from Baguio, Philippines. She is author of 16 books, and served as the 20th Poet Laureate of the U.S. State of Virginia from 2020 to 2022. A 'ghazal' is an Arabic love poem with recurring rhyme and limited stanzas. It first appeared during Asian Pacific Heritage Month in the Saipan Tribune in May 2023. Patas guaka lovers may also enjoy the poem.

Ghazal, with cow burial

By Luisa A. Igloria

"There are only 31 horse burials in Britain and they are all with men."

Out of a pit they've found a woman's bones – whittled by time
bearded by dust, clutching the ambered remains of a cow.

Was she matriarch, widow, wife? Did she die struck by illness or blight?
archeologists say her wealth and status are proven by this cow.

Some days, I quip to friends and family: my name might as well be
Bob (short for Beast of Burden). But life's yoke is heavier than a cow.

What would I want to take with me? In Chinese burials
the dead are ferried to the afterlife: not on cows
but in paper limousines with symbols for wealth: coins, bills, sweets,
cigars, what one liked here enough to take to there; but not a cow -

In the winding Cordilleras I call home, the dead are neatly tucked among
the hills, with jars of betel nut and agate bowls–but not a cow -

A friend reminds me: in Hindu myth, should the population
be in danger, they'll save the women, children, and the cows.

The cow that in this life was a cow, does it remain the same? Does it dream
of feathered grass in the fields, of gnats, the low symphony of fellow cows
chewing the cud? They poke at beetles the color of jewels–
embellishments on face plates of sleeping mummies. The cow
as sacrifice, as plenty, as months of food and fat and solid warmth.
And the woman: how was she loved, missed, valued more than cow? "

Ethnic cleansing in Gaza won't bring peace or security to Israel

By TRUDY RUBIN
The Philadelphia Inquirer

Trudy Rubin is a columnist and editorial-board member for the The Philadelphia Inquirer.

While the world's Mideast focus has shifted to Lebanon and Syria, the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza only gets worse.

In the 14 months since Hamas carried out a brutal surprise attack in Israel, killing 1,200 and taking 250 hostages, Israel has decimated the group's leadership and cadres, blasted its underground tunnel network, and killed at least 45,000 Palestinians—as many as two-thirds of them civilians. It has also destroyed most of the Gaza Strip's housing and civilian infrastructure.

Most of Gaza's civilians have been forced by fighting and by Israeli orders to relocate from their homes into flimsy tent camps or overcrowded schools and mosques that are never safe from bombing. Hunger is rampant, as Israelis block aid trucks or bar security for those who enter. Most hospitals have been destroyed by Israeli bombs or ground fighting, and the few that remain have no supplies to treat the ill or wounded.

Worst of all, Gazans who have remained in the north of the strip, clinging to their damaged homes, are being ordered by Israel to evacuate south, supposedly so that Israeli forces can put down pockets of Hamas resistance. Yet, hard-line Israeli cabinet ministers make clear they want to empty northern Gaza of Palestinians to rebuild Israeli Jewish settlements there — or even drive the Gazans into Egypt.

Some, like National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, openly call for promoting "the voluntary departure" of Gazans. Translation: Make their life unbearable.

This Israeli behavior is clearly ethnic cleansing, which is a war crime. Sure, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu denies it. Yet, even his tough former defense minister (now a Netanyahu critic), Moshe Ya'alon, responded bluntly when asked if Israel was "on the way" toward ethnic cleansing. "Why on the way?" he retorted. "They're basically cleaning the territory of Arabs."

Unless Israel's allies and moderate Arab partners pressure Netanyahu to surge supplies to Gazan civilians and halt ethnic cleansing, this behavior will boomerang against Israel and its future security, further destabilizing the Middle East.

Western journalists have been almost banned from Gaza, with a few exceptions on official junkets. To get a sense of the worsening conditions in Gaza, I spoke with two American doctors who worked there as volunteers in October for the medical relief agency MedGlobal.

Greg Shay, a retired pediatric pulmonologist from Alameda, Calif., worked at Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis, which has the largest remaining children's ward in Gaza. He has undertaken 35 medical volunteer missions across the globe, including two in Gaza prior to Oct. 7, 2023.

"Working in refugee camps around the world, I have been faced with very difficult situations," he told me. "However, my recent, third trip to Gaza was not only the most devastating and demanding physically, but more overwhelming emotionally. The desolate environment with total destruction of all buildings, homes, roads, electricity, and water, coupled with forced malnutrition and rampant infectious diseases, brings it to an all-new low."

"This was, of course, compounded by the lack of simple medical supplies, medications, soap, and even baby formula," he said. "The suffering, amputations, and children shot in the head by snipers will live with me forever."

Shay described hugely crowded wards where there wasn't room to isolate infectious diseases, and children were so malnourished they couldn't resist infections.

"The hospitals are flooded with diseases we haven't seen in Gaza, which had a 95% vaccination rate before the war. Kids come in starving, with pneumonia, hepatitis, white phosphorus burns, and we don't have 80% of the meds that we need."

The children's cancer ward was bombed, and there is no way to treat cancer cases. The kidney dialysis building was also destroyed by Israeli soldiers, he said, along with ventilators and EKG machines.

Yet, entering Gaza, Shay and other volunteers are not permitted to bring in desperately needed medicine or equipment. "The saddest part was that I had all this cystic fibrosis equipment in Amman, Jordan, and I wasn't allowed to bring it in. Thirty children died."

I heard equally harrowing stories from Nabeel Rana, a vascular surgeon from Charlotte, North Carolina, who served two weeks at Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis and two weeks at Al-Aqsa Hospital in Deir al-Balah, having previously volunteered at Al-Aqsa Hospital from June to July.

"Conditions were definitely worse in October," he told me. "We had no sutures or dressings or gowns. No aid was coming in."

One of his most indelible memories was the children "strewed across the floor" of the emergency room at Al-Aqsa Hospital. "I've never been in a place where I saw so many kid amputees of all ages, from toddlers to 8 or 9 ... with shrapnel wounds and massive gashes in their heads and limbs."

Rana marveled at the courage of the doctors there, some of whom had lost their entire family in Israeli bomb strikes. And the ambulance drivers who went to retrieve bodies, even though they knew "they were at risk of an Israeli double tap," meaning a strike at the rescue workers after the initial bombing.

These scenes are not just the normal carnage of war, but the product of Israeli targeting of hospitals and medical workers — and the blockage of food and medical supplies into Gaza.

Israeli officials say hospital strikes are necessary because Hamas fighters hide within the facilities. But when Hamas is reeling, and its commanders are gone, it is questionable why medical facilities are still targeted.

On Dec. 6, Israeli strikes killed and wounded scores in and around Kamal Radwan Hospital in northern Gaza, which Israel had earlier ordered be evacuated. Residents in the north still desperately need the barely functioning hospital. Is its potential demise part of the move to make northern Gaza unlivable?

Israeli officials also blame the lack of food and medical supplies on international aid agencies not delivering the goods from trucks lined up at the border. That, also, is only part of the story.

Yes, many trucks are waiting to cross, but often because Israel keeps changing the rules. Moreover, aid agencies tell me it is also because Israel has made it impossible to secure the contents, barring Palestinian police from guarding the trucks because they worked for the Gazan government that was run by Hamas before the war.

In fact, international aid agencies say the police were mostly professional. Moreover, private citizen groups who volunteer to guard the trucks have also been targeted by Israel. And Israeli troops often stand by as looters attack unprotected aid.

"There needs to be some international force approved by all to protect the aid convoys," I was told by Sean Carroll, the CEO of the U.S.-based aid agency Anera.

But as of now, there is no visible Israeli effort to improve the humanitarian disaster in Gaza and surge the aid in.

In October, when the entry of food aid virtually stopped, President Joe Biden gave Israel 30 days to improve. He failed to penalize Israel when that period ended, and there was only minimal improvement.

Negotiations have begun once more on a temporary cease-fire in Gaza and the return of some Israeli hostages by Hamas. Yet, Netanyahu has made clear that Israeli troops will remain indefinitely in Gaza, and has offered no political plan for how nearly two million dispossessed Gazan civilians can survive.

Both Netanyahu and President-elect Donald Trump appear to believe that Saudi Arabia and the Gulf emirates will rebuild the Gaza Strip. But the Saudis have made clear that they aren't interested in so doing if Israel reoccupies and resettles Gaza, which guarantees a new generation of resistance fighters will rise. They want Netanyahu to lay out a path to a concrete political future for the Palestinians.

If, instead, this Israeli government insists on ethnically cleansing Gaza (and the West Bank), a long-term Palestinian insurgency will bubble up from the ruins, built from angry young men. That instability will threaten Israel's future and prevent any normalization with Saudi Arabia.

And one day, Israel will no longer be able to prevent foreign journalists from witnessing the wreckage of Gaza that has gone way beyond Israel's right to defend itself. Those scenes are already alienating a generation in the West against Israel's very existence.

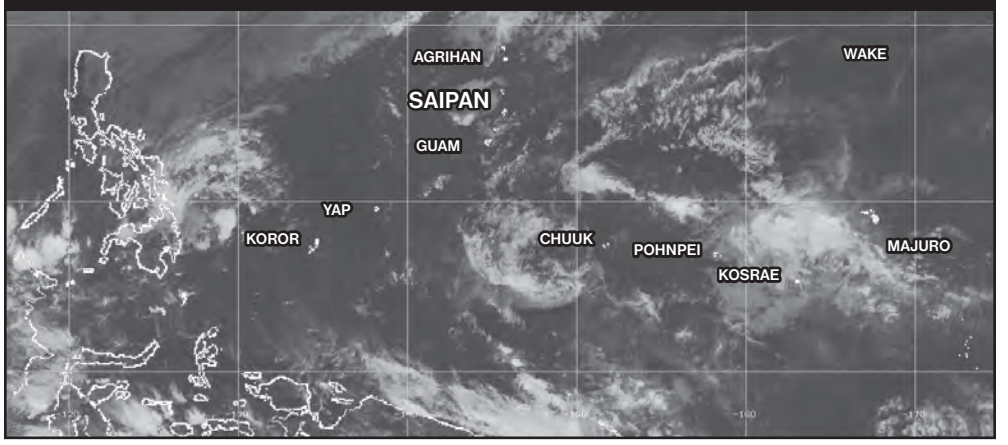
Starving Gazan civilians and denying them medical care is not only a war crime but also a losing strategy for Israel. It needs to be stopped. Now.

The Weather

5-DAY FORECAST FOR SAIPAN AND TINIAN

TODAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY
Mostly cloudy. Scattered showers and isolated thunderstorms. East to southeast winds 10 to 20 mph. Chance of showers 40 percent.	Mostly cloudy. A 40 percent chance of showers and a slight chance of thunderstorms. East winds 10 to 15 mph.	Mostly cloudy. A 40 percent chance of showers and slight chance of thunderstorms.	Partly cloudy with a 20 percent chance of showers.	Partly cloudy with a 20 percent chance of showers.
87° 77°	87° 77°	86° 77°	87° 78°	87° 78°

YESTERDAY'S SATELLITE IMAGE



PICTURE TIME: 6:26 AM THURSDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2024

Western North Pacific between equator and 25N from 130E to 180.

A high risk of of rip currents remains in effect for north and east facing reefs. A strong line of showers came through Guam`s waters early this morning. Winds were moderate to near-gale force with gusts exceeding gale force, or 34 kt. Some localized flooding was anticipated based on rainfall accumulation at the Geomag observatory / Andersen AFB rain gauge. A strong downburst signature was noted near the Navy base in radar imagery around 2 am this morning. The trade-wind surge is still running rampant across the Marianas. Showers are expected to be scattered through tonight with the strongest showers effecting the lower Marianas. Given the consistency of strong winds over the past few nights, winds were increased to reflect this. Sustained winds are pushing near Small Craft Advisory level, or 22 kt; however, gusts are not expected to be frequent enough to warrant the advisory. Boaters should exercise caution when near showers.

Satellite image and accompanying information are provided by the National Weather Service. For an updated weather forecast, visit the National Weather Service Guam homepage: https://www.weather.gov/gum/

MICRONESIA		▲ ▼ °F
Guam and Rota	Cloudy	86° / 77°
Palau	Mostly Cloudy	88° / 79°
Yap	Mostly Cloudy	88° / 80°
Chuuk	Mostly Cloudy	88° / 76°
Pohnpei	Cloudy	88° / 77°
Kosrae	Showers in the Vicinity	84° / 78°
Majuro	Mostly Cloudy/Wind	85° / 80°

DAY	SUNRISE	SUNSET
Today	6:37 AM	5:51 PM
Saturday	6:38 AM	5:51 PM
Sunday	6:38 AM	5:52 PM
Monday	6:39 AM	5:52 PM
Tuesday	6:39 AM	5:53 PM

DAY	MOONRISE	MOONSET	MOONRISE
Friday	-	10:35 AM	10:26 PM
Saturday	-	11:12 AM	11:14 PM
Sunday	-	11:46 AM	-
Monday	12:00 AM	12:19 PM	-
Monday	12:46 AM	12:51 PM	-

AROUND THE GLOBE		▲ ▼ °F
Auckland	Partly Cloudy	70° / 61°
Beijing	Fair	40° / 17°
Hong Kong	Fair	70° / 53°
Honolulu	Partly Cloudy	81° / 71°
London	Partly Cloudy	39° / 34°
Los Angeles	Sunny	74° / 50°
Manila	Mostly Cloudy	87° / 79°
Melbourne	Rain	72° / 57°
Miami	Cloudy	77° / 73°
New York	Rain	54° / 41°
Osaka	Partly Cloudy	48° / 39°
Paris	Mostly Cloudy	37° / 27°
Busan	Sunny	45° / 28°
Rome	Showers	54° / 46°
Salem	Cloudy	58° / 50°
San Francisco	Sunny	58° / 46°
Seoul	Sunny	36° / 13°
Tokyo	Fair	54° / 39°
Washington, DC	Rain Shower	56° / 39°

TIDES: SAIPAN HARBOR TODAY		FEET
4:59 AM	Low Tide	-0.37
12:31 PM	High Tide	1.62
6:07 PM	Low Tide	1.06
10:08 PM	High Tide	1.38

NEWS DESK For news tips, corrections and requests for news coverage, call (670) 235-NEWS (6397), 235-2440, fax 235,3740. E-mail: editor@saipantribune.com. Website:www.saipantribune.com.

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FLIGHT SCHEDULE AS OF DECEMBER 1, 2024

DEPARTURES

SAIPAN-GUAM (GUM)

UA076	9:50AM	10:35AM	Daily

SAIPAN- NARITA (NRT)

UA824	1:20PM	4:00PM	1, 3, 5

GUAM-MANILA (MNL)

PR 111	5:55AM	7:55AM	Daily
UA183	7:55PM	9:50PM	Daily
UA193	7:55PM	11:50PM	2, 5 via Palau

SAIPAN-MANILA (MNL)

7C3218/2305	2:45AM	10:20PM	Daily via Incheon
UA076/183 Guam	9:50AM	9:50PM	Daily via
UA076/193	9:50AM	11:50PM	2, 5 via Guam, Palau

SAIPAN-INCHEON (ICN)

TW308	2:30AM	6:25AM	Daily
7C3218	2:45AM	6:45AM	Daily from Dec 8
7C3212	4:35PM	8:25PM	Daily

SAIPAN-BUSAN (PUS)

7C3552	3:55AM	7:20AM	3, 6 from Dec 25

SAIPAN-HONG KONG (HKG)

HX77	3:05AM	5:55AM	1, 5

ARRIVALS

GUAM (GUM)-SAIPAN

UA174	8:00AM	8:45AM	Daily

NARITA (NRT)-SAIPAN

UA825	5:30PM	10:05PM	2, 4, 7

MANILA (MNL)-GUAM

UA156	00:40AM	6:25AM	3, 6
PR110	10:05PM	3:55AM+1	Daily
UA192	10:40PM	6:30AM+1	2, 5 via Palau
UA184	10:55PM	4:40AM+1	1, 3, 4, 6, 7

MANILA (MNL)-SAIPAN

UA156	00:40AM	8:45AM	3, 6 via Guam
UA192/174	10:40PM	8:45AM+1	2, 5 via Palau, Guam
UA184/174	10:55PM	8:45AM +1	1, 3, 4, 6,7 via Guam
7C2306/3407	11:20PM	3:30PM+1	Daily

INCHEON (ICN)-SAIPAN

7C3211	10:10AM	3:30PM	Daily
TW307	8:00PM	1:30AM+1	Daily
7C3217	8:10PM	1:40AM+1	Daily from Dec 8

BUSAN (PUS)-SAIPAN

7C3551	9:25PM	2:50AM+1	2, 5 from Dec 25

HONG KONG (HKG)-SAIPAN

HX76	6:25PM	1:35AM+1	4, 7

LEGEND: Days: Monday (1), Tuesday (2), Wednesday (3), Thursday (4), Friday (5), Saturday (6) and Sunday (7); UA United Airlines; PR, Philippine Airlines; TW, T'Way Air; OZ, Asiana Airlines; 7C, Jeju Air; BX, Air Busan • ETD: Estimated Time of Departure; ETA: Estimated Time of Arrival. *(The Saipan Tribune is not responsible for any changes in the schedule.)*

STAR MARIANAS AIR, INC.

FLIGHT SCHEDULE AS OF JANUARY 2, 2024

SAIPAN TO ROTA

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
1301	SAIPAN	ROTA	08:30	09:00	Daily
1302	SAIPAN	ROTA	10:30	11:00	Daily
1303	SAIPAN	ROTA	15:30	16:00	Daily

ROTA TO SAIPAN

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
3101	ROTA	SAIPAN	9:30	10:00	Daily
3102	ROTA	SAIPAN	11:30	12:00	Saturday & Sunday
3103	ROTA	SAIPAN	13:30	14:00	Monday To Friday
3104	ROTA	SAIPAN	16:30	17:00	Daily

ROTA TO GUAM

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
3401	ROTA	GUAM	11:30	12:00	Monday To Friday

GUAM TO ROTA

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
4301	GUAM	ROTA	12:30	13:00	Monday To Friday

SAIPAN TO TINIAN

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
1201	SAIPAN	TINIAN	7:30	7:45	Daily
1202	SAIPAN	TINIAN	8:00	8:15	Daily
1203	SAIPAN	TINIAN	9:00	9:15	Daily
1204	SAIPAN	TINIAN	10:00	10:15	Daily
1206	SAIPAN	TINIAN	14:00	14:15	Daily
1207	SAIPAN	TINIAN	15:00	15:15	Daily
1208	SAIPAN	TINIAN	16:00	16:15	Daily
1209	SAIPAN	TINIAN	17:00	17:15	Daily

TINIAN TO SAIPAN

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
2101	TINIAN	SAIPAN	8:00	8:15	Daily
2102	TINIAN	SAIPAN	8:30	8:45	Daily
2103	TINIAN	SAIPAN	9:30	9:45	Daily
2104	TINIAN	SAIPAN	10:30	10:45	Daily
2106	TINIAN	SAIPAN	14:30	14:45	Daily
2107	TINIAN	SAIPAN	15:30	15:45	Daily
2108	TINIAN	SAIPAN	16:30	16:45	Daily
2109	TINIAN	SAIPAN	17:30	17:45	Daily

Customers First
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CHRISTMAS SALE

5 DAY SALE ONLY!

DEC 20-24, 2024

CERTIFIED ANGUS BEEF® BRAND

Certified Angus Beef
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CAB BEEF RIB ROAST — NOW $14.99/LB WAS $15.59

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CAB TOP ROUND ROAST — NOW $6.19/LB WAS $6.39

CAB T-BONE STEAK — NOW $15.89/LB WAS $16.89

PECAN PRALINE SPIRAL SLICED HALF HAMS 9LB — NOW $4.99/LB WAS $6.99

SUGARDALE SPIRAL HONEY HAM — NOW $4.99/LB WAS $6.49

GREAT HARVEST DUTCH APPLE PIE — NOW $18.95 WAS $19.95

PRAIRIE FRESH USA PRIME — USA PRIME PORK

USA PRIME PORK RIBS 3 DOWN — NOW $4.19/LB WAS $4.79

USA PRIME PORKLOIN B-LESS STEAK — NOW $4.49/LB WAS $5.19

PORK SHOULDER PICNIC SMOKED HAM BONE IN 6-9LB — NOW $3.99/LB WAS $4.59

CHICKEN THIGH BONELESS TRAY PACK — NOW $4.49/LB WAS $5.79

FRENCHED LAMB RACK — NOW $22.99/LB WAS $26.99

BUTTERBALL TURKEY — NOW $1.99/LB WAS $2.99

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MRS CUBBISONS CORN BREAD STUFFING 12OZ — NOW $3.99 WAS $5.29

STRAWBERRY — NOW $14.99/EA WAS $17.99

MANDARIN ORANGE — NOW $7.99/BAG WAS $9.99

KEEBLER GRAHAM CRACKER PIE CRUST 12/9OZ — NOW $4.19 WAS $5.59

ORANGE CELLO BAG — NOW $7.99/BAG WAS $11.49

POTATO YUKON GOLD — NOW $0.99/LB WAS $2.39

LIBBY PUMPKIN PIE MIX 30OZ — NOW $5.79 WAS $6.79

OCEAN SPRAY WHOLE CRANBERRY SAUCE 14OZ — NOW $2.29 WAS $3.29

POTATO — NOW $0.99/LB WAS $1.99

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OSTER 700-WATT PLASTIC JAR BLENDER BLACK
NOW $36.55 WAS $49.95

BRENTWOOD 5-SPD HAND MIXER
NOW $12.55 WAS $18.95

BETTER CHEF 350W STAND MIXER
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BETTER CHEF 10SPD 350W GLASS JAR BLENDER
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BRENTWOOD XL DIGITAL-5QT. AIR FRYER
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NOW $89.55 WAS $139.95

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GALANZ 1.1CUFT. 1000WTMICROWAVE BLK STAINLESS
NOW $129.55 WAS $159.95

GALANZ 0.9CUFT 900W MICROWAVE OVEN ASSORTED
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B&D 0.7CUFT 700W MICROWAVE OVEN
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WATER GUN 23"
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RC TRUCK 1:64 SCALE W/ LIGHTS & SOUND
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R/C AUTO MODEL RACING CAR 15" W/LIGHT & SOUND
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LITTLE PIANO 3D LIGHT KEYBOARD W/MICROPHONE
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FRICTION CONSTRUCTION VEHICLE 2PC 8"
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BEAUTY JUMBO FAIRY DOLL 17"
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MY MINI IRONING SET
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BIL-LIARDS MEDIUM PLAY SET
NOW $6.55 WAS $9.95

TWISTER GLOW TRACK RACING SET W/LED LIGHT
NOW $11.55 WAS $15.95

Radewagen hails House passage of pay raise for military

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Delegate Uifa'atali Amata Radewagen (R-A. Samoa) is hailing the pay raise for the military in the final National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2025, passed Wednesday by the House with a vote of 281-140. Under the bill, following negotiated Senate-House agreement, Congress raises pay for all military by 4.5%, and for junior enlisted the raise is a substantial 14.5%.

» NDAA boosts Pacific security

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

The U.S. Capitol's east view from the Senate side.

"I am happy to see this much deserved raise for many of our own from American Samoa," said Radewagen. "A lot of our enlisted Toa o Samoa will be better off with a 14.5% raise, while officers and senior enlisted will also receive a 4.5% increase."

In June, the House passed their version of the NDAA, known as the Servicemember Quality of Life Improvement and National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2025, while the Senate passed their version in July, leading to a Conference Committee to reach a final bill, an amended Senate bill. Each year the NDAA is the largest Defense authorization bill, comprising all aspects of the Pentagon's operations. The Senate and House aligned the two bills, which both included pay raise proposals at different rates and various other differences. The agreement pays junior enlisted (E-1 through E-4) a 14.5% increase.

"We must keep our military strong and ready, including a focus on the Indo-Pacific region, which this bill does," continued Radewagen. "In this bill, Congress has expressed many important priorities supporting our Service Members and military families, making improvements to their housing, training, readiness, equipment, cost of living, medical care, and all operations, along with an important boost in Pacific security." ***(PR)***

GCC to host Young Pacific Leaders Academy for Women Entrepreneurs

Applications for the Young Pacific Leaders Academy for Women Entrepreneurs are now available to interested women entrepreneurs throughout the South Pacific. The APL's AWE aims to empower and elevate the next generation of Pacific business leaders throughout the region.

Facilitated by Guam Community College, the AWE will consist of a 12-month business development and leadership virtual training program, catering to women of the Pacific from the 24 island nations within the YPL network.

As part of the program, participants will convene at the Guam Community College campus in Mangilao, Guam from April 21 to 25, 2025, for the Where Dreams Become Reality Conference, featuring presentations from expert speakers, workshops, networking sessions, and multicultural excursions to build participants' entrepreneurial and leadership capacity.

"Guam Community College is excited to host the Where Dreams Become Reality Conference, for women entrepreneurs throughout the Pacific. Opportunities to connect with successful women in business gives the advantage of wisdom and experience in building a sustainable and thriving organization," according to Dr. Mary Okada, president and CEO of Guam Community College. "We are eager to take our decades of knowledge and success in helping to train leaders in all corners of our society and impart that knowledge to these amazing and ambitious women in business."

United States Pacific Regional Engagement specialist Mara Hosoda Su'a said the conference and year-long initiative aims to foster the next generation of Pacific women business leaders from around the region.

"Following the conference, the participants—some who will have established businesses already while others will just be getting started — will continue to meet weekly online to complete the Dream Builder Course business plans," Su'a explains. "This will provide the participants with the skills and capacity necessary to create innovative and sustainable entrepreneurial solutions which address social and economic challenges in their home and island communities in the Pacific region.

"YPL sees the AWE initiative as a unique opportunity for young women in the region, to truly thrive in business and in return, contribute to the economy and provide for their communities." Su'a added.

Launched in 2013, the YPL initiative is the U.S. Government's signature program to strengthen leadership development and networking in the Pacific. Through educational, cultural and regional exchanges, and seed funding, YPL seeks to build the leadership capabilities of youth in the region and strengthen ties between the U.S. and the Pacific.

The YPL initiative focuses on critical topics identified by youth in the region: education, environment and resource management, civic leadership, economic and social development.

Applications for the AWE are now being accepted, until Jan. 15, 2025. Interested applicants should submit the application and all required documents to learning4life@guamcc.edu. For more information, contact (671) 735-5640 extension 5410. ***(PR)***

USDA invests $35.5M in A. Samoa solar projects to deliver affordable clean energy

HILO, Hawaii—USDA Rural Development State director Chris Kanazawa announced $35.5 million in total investments to Banana Solar LLC, and Mana Solar, LLC, both located in American Samoa. The projects will help develop renewable energy systems to provide power for people on Tutuila Island and support community efforts to rely on clean energy.

"It's an unfortunate reality that our island communities endure some of the highest electricity prices in the world," Kanazawa said. "These investments, through the Inflation Reduction Act, will support clean, renewable energy generation in American Samoa, which will ultimately improve access to affordable, and more stable energy for the people of Tutuila Island."

Banana Solar LLC plans to use a $12-million investment, provided through the Powering Affordable Clean Energy program, to develop a 6.6-megawatt solar and battery energy storage system for renewable energy. This will provide power to approximately 1,300 households on Tutuila Island, meeting nearly 6% of their energy needs with renewable energy.

"The 20-megawatt Banana and Mana Solar projects represent a proud achievement for American Samoa that will place the territory on the cutting edge of solar energy production in the Pacific Islands," said Banana Solar LLC and Mana Solar, LLC president Daniel Myung. "Instead of buying fossil fuels, American Samoa Power Authority will now be buying renewable energy, at about 50% less than the cost of diesel."

Also in American Samoa, Mana Solar LLC plans to use a $23.5 million investment to develop a 13.4-megawatt community solar and battery energy storage system. This will provide power to approximately 2,500 households on Tutuila Island, meeting nearly 12% of their energy needs with renewable energy. These projects will help the American Samoa Renewable Energy Committee achieve its goal of using 100% clean energy by 2024.

U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced $78.3 million in partially forgivable loans for clean energy projects through the PACE program to help lower electricity bills for households, expand reliable access to renewable energy and create jobs for rural families, small businesses and agricultural producers. The investments are going to organizations based in Maryland, Ohio, Vermont, Washington and American Samoa.

The funding for USDA's PACE program is from the Inflation Reduction Act, which is the largest investment in rural electrification since President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed the Rural Electrification Act into law in 1936 as part of the New Deal. Inflation Reduction Act programs partner with rural communities to deliver clean, reliable and affordable energy.

In May 2023, USDA made $1 billion available through PACE to fund new clean energy projects and energy storage in rural America. This program provides low interest loans with up to 60% loan forgiveness to renewable energy developers, rural electric cooperatives and other rural energy providers for renewable energy storage and projects that use wind, solar, hydropower, geothermal and biomass.

By using renewable energy from natural sources, these investments make it more affordable for people to heat their households, run their businesses, power cars, schools, hospitals and more.

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. Under the Biden-Harris Administration, USDA is transforming America's food system with a greater focus on more resilient local and regional food production, fairer markets for all producers, ensuring access to safe, healthy and nutritious food in all communities, building new markets and streams of income for farmers and producers using climate-smart food and forestry practices, making historic investments in infrastructure and clean energy capabilities in rural America, and committing to equity across the department by removing systemic barriers and building a workforce more representative of America. To learn more, visit www.usda.gov. ***(PR)***

Business

United opens bookings for new nonstop Taipei-Guam service

GUAM—United Airlines, the largest U.S. airline serving Taipei from the United States, announced that customers can now book travel between Taipei and Guam for travel beginning in April 2025. United announced the new nonstop service last month, which will provide twice-weekly service between the two destinations on Wednesdays and Saturdays.

The Guam to Taipei flight will depart Guam at 7am and arrive in Taipei at 9:25am local time. Return flights from Taipei to Guam will depart at 10:30am and 11am on Wednesdays and Saturdays, respectively, and arrive in Guam at 4:20pm and 4:50pm the same day. United will operate the flights with a Boeing 737-800 aircraft, offering 166 seats, 16 of which are in business class.

"The launch of the new Taipei-Guam service underscores United's commitment to Guam and the region by opening new routes that offer more ways for travelers to enjoy Guam and the Micronesia region," said Sam Shinohara, managing director of Airport Operations, Asia/Pacific at United. "Opening the new market will support the island's tourism recovery efforts and plans to diversify its inbound markets. The new route provides convenient connections for travelers throughout Asia and a new direct and convenient destination for Guam travelers to enjoy Taiwan's exciting and unique cultural, culinary, natural, and historical experiences."

George Chiu, chairman of the board for the Guam Visitors Bureau, said, "We are super excited with this upcoming launch from United Airlines. This Taipei flight is one of the few non-Japan origin flights with a daytime arrival in Guam, which in itself will be a huge marketing advantage. It lends further support that United is our hometown carrier and here to stay."

UNITED

United Airlines announced a new nonstop Guam-Taipei service next April that will provide twice-weekly service between the two destinations on Wednesdays and Saturdays.

Guam residents will not need a visa to travel to Taipei. Travel can be booked through travel agents, united.com, the United app, and through the Guam City Ticket Office in Tiyan. Customers in Guam and Micronesia needing assistance can call 1-800-UNITED1 (1-800-864-8331).

About United

At United, Good Leads The Way. With U.S. mainland hubs in Chicago, Denver, Houston, Los Angeles, New York/Newark, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C., United operates the most comprehensive global route network among North American carriers and is now the largest airline in the world as measured by available seat miles. For more about how to join the United team, visit www.united.com/careers and more information about the company is at www.united.com. United Airlines Holdings, Inc., the parent company of United Airlines, Inc., is traded on the Nasdaq under the symbol "UAL." ***(PR)***

Taipei (TPE) – Guam (GUM) Service, Effective April 2, 2025*

Flight No.	Depart	Time	Arrival	Time	Frequency
UA 0165	Guam (GUM)	7:00 a.m.	Taipei (TPE)	9:25 a.m.	Wednesdays and Saturdays
UA 0166	Taipei (TPE)	10:30 a.m.	Guam (GUM)	4:20 p.m.	Wednesdays
UA 0166	Taipei (TPE)	11:00 a.m.	Guam (GUM)	4:50 p.m.	Saturdays

**Schedule subject to change*

UNITED STATES
Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands
COUNCIL ON DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

NOTICE OF COUNCIL MEETING

Pursuant to Public Law 8-41, Section 12, the CNMI Council on Developmental Disabilities hereby gives notice that it will hold its 3rd Quarter General Membership Meeting on December 30, 2024 from 9:00am to 11:00 am at the Center for Living Independently, Capitol Hill

AGENDA

I. **Call to Order**

II. **Roll Call**

III. **Review & Adoption of the Agenda of December 30, 2024**

IV. **Review & Adoption of Meeting Minutes of July 31, 2024**

V. **Old Business**
   a. **DIF Grant – CNMI TECH PIECS Update**

VI. **New Business**
   a. **Family Transition Symposium 2025**
   b. **Developmental Disabilities Month 2025**

VII. **Reports**
   a. **Chairperson**
   b. **State Plan Committee Chairperson**
   c. **Fiscal Committee Chairperson**
   d. **Executive Director**

VIII. **Miscellaneous**

IX. **Next Meeting**

X. **Adjournment**

Note: Pursuant to P.L. 8-41, Section 13(a) 7, the Council may vote to meet in Executive Session. In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), individuals who wish to attend this meeting and require special accommodations are requested to call the Council 5 days in advance at 664-7000. The Public is welcome to submit written or 3 minutes of oral comments regarding the agenda above.

/s/ Concepcion Ulloa
Chairperson

This ad is supported by the Administration for Community Living (ACL), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of a financial assistance award total $273,990 with 100 percent funding by ACL/HHS. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by ACL/HHS, or the U.S. Government.

COMMONWEALTH UTILITIES CORPORATION
OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

INVITATION FOR BIDS
CUC-IFB-25-009

SEWER MAIN AND MANHOLE REPLACEMENT/REHAB/UPGRADE PHASE II

The Office of the Executive Director, Commonwealth Utilities Corporation (CUC) is soliciting competitive sealed bids from qualified firms for the construction of the Sewer Main and Manhole Replacement/Rehab/Upgrade Phase II in Saipan, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

The project consists of realignment and replacement of the existing 4-inch bypass sewer line in **Capitol Hill Village** along **Capitol Hill Road** with a new 8-inch PVC distribution main. The scope includes the installation of appurtenances, fittings, new manholes with accessories, and the rehabilitation and reconnection of existing manholes, including the replacement of their accessories. All work must be performed in accordance with the Project Plans and Specifications, ensuring no disruption to the daily operation of the sewer system. The Commonwealth Utilities Corporation (CUC) requires the project to be completed within three hundred sixty-five (365) calendar days from the date of contract award.

The project is funded by a grant from the United States of Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA). The award of this project is contingent upon receipt of approval for project award from USEPA

Prospective Bidders must pre-register with the CUC Procurement & Supply Division. The Bid Package may be obtained from the CUC Procurement and Supply Office, 3rd Floor, Room No. 3, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building, Saipan, between 7:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, except on government observed holidays, upon completion of registration and presentation of a receipt evidencing a non-refundable payment to the CUC Treasury Section, by cash, check or credit card in the amount of $200.00 (non-refundable) for one IFB package set.

A Pre-Bid Conference followed by site visits will be held on **December 23, 2024, at 10:00 AM(CHST)** at the CUC Main Conference Room, 3rd Floor, Room No.17, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building.

One (1) original and Five (5) hard copies of the bid MUST be submitted in a sealed envelope marked "**CUC-IFB-25-009, SEWER MAIN AND MANHOLE REPLACEMENT/REHAB/UPGRADE PHASE II**" to the CUC Procurement & Supply Office, 3rd Floor, Room No. 3, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building, P.O. Box 501220, Saipan, MP 96950, no later than **10:00 AM (ChST) January 16, 2025**, at which time they will be publicly opened and read aloud. Bids mailed via postal or courier service must be received on or before due date and time or post-marked before due date and time.

Bid shall be submitted on the provided Bid Forms. Bidders are required to complete all Bid Forms. Bidders may supplement this form as appropriate. Bids will be required to be submitted under a condition of irrevocability for a period of 60 days after submission. **Late submissions and conditional bids will not be considered.**

A *Bid Guarantee* of not less than fifteen (15%) percent of the total bid price must accompany the bids. The security deposit may be in cash, certified check, cashier's check, or bid bond executed by a surety company holding a certificate of authority from the United States Secretary of Treasury as an acceptable surety. A Payment Bond of one hundred (100%) percent and a Performance Bond of one hundred (100%) percent of the total bid price will be required upon the execution of the contract by the successful bidder. The Payment and Performance bond must be executed by a surety company holding a certificate of authority from the United States Secretary of Treasury as an acceptable surety. Surety Company must be authorized to do business in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands or otherwise secured in a manner satisfactory to CUC, for the protection of all persons supplying labor and material to the contractor or its subcontractors for the performance of the work provided for in the contract.

All insurers' questions, concerns and qualification shall be handled by the Department of Commerce Office of the Insurance Commissioner (OIC). The OIC is tasked with regulating and monitoring compliance to the CNMI's Insurance Code (Title 4, Division 7). Bidders are required to submit a clearance from the OIC certifying their insurer of choice is in compliance with the CNMI's Insurance Code.

Bidders are required to comply with all CNMI and applicable Federal Laws. This bid and the ensuing contract shall be executed pursuant to the CUC Procurement Regulations.

This Invitation for Bids does not commit CUC to the award of a contract or contracts, nor to pay any cost incurred in the preparation and submission of bids in anticipation of a contract. Bidders are advised that CUC assumes no responsibility in any act of omission on the part of the bidders due to lack of information or understanding of the bid requirements in the course of Contractor's preparation of a bid under the contract.

Questions or requests for clarification will be entertained only from registered Proponents and must be submitted in writing no later than **10:00 a.m. (CHST) on December 30, 2024** to Manny B. Sablan, CUC Purchasing Officer via email address manny.sablan@cucgov.org with a copy to Joel Puyat, CUC Water/Wastewater Engineer at email joel.puyat@cucgov.org, and to Marcela Tenorio, P&S, Senior Administrative Technician at marcela.tenorio@cucgov.org.

CUC reserves the right to reject any or all bids and waive any imperfection in the bid proposal if in its sole opinion, to do so would be in the best interest of CUC. All bids shall become the property of CUC.

KEVIN O. WATSON
Executive Director

MANNY B. SABLAN
Purchasing Administrator

Nation

Senate passes defense bill that will raise troop pay

WASHINGTON (AP)—The Senate passed a defense bill Wednesday that authorizes significant pay raises for junior enlisted service members, aims to counter China's growing power and boosts overall military spending to $895 billion while also stripping coverage of transgender medical treatments for children of military members.

The annual defense authorization bill usually gains strong bipartisan support and has not failed to pass Congress in nearly six decades, but the Pentagon policy measure in recent years has become a battleground for cultural issues. Republicans this year sought to tack on to the legislation priorities for social conservatives, contributing to a months-long negotiation over the bill and a falloff in support from Democrats.

Still, the bill passed comfortably 85-14, sending it to President Joe Biden. Eleven senators who caucus with Democrats, as well as three Republicans, voted against the legislation.

The bill "isn't perfect, but it still includes some very good things that Democrats fought for," said Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., in a floor speech. "It has strong provisions to stand up against the Chinese Communist Party here on a national security basis."

In the House, a majority of Democrats voted against the bill last week after House Speaker Mike Johnson insisted on adding the provision to ban the military health system from providing transgender medical care for children. The legislation easily passed by a vote of 281-140.

» Aims to counter China's power

Senate Republican leaders argued that its 1% increase for defense spending was not enough, especially at a time of global unrest and challenges to American dominance. Senate Republicans had argued for a generational boost to defense spending this year, but are planning another push for more defense funding once they control the White House and Congress next year.

"We are currently experiencing the most dangerous national security moments since World War II," said Republican Sen. Roger Wicker, who will chair the Senate Armed Services Committee next year. He has pushed for larger boosts to defense funding that would break spending caps that were agreed to in the bipartisan deal to suspend the nation's debt ceiling last year.

The annual defense authorization bill directs key Pentagon policy, but it would still need to be backed up with an appropriations package.

Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky said in a floor speech this week that without the topline increase "major bill provisions like a pay raise for enlisted servicemembers will come at the expense of investments in the critical weapons systems and munitions that deter conflict and keep them safe."

The legislation provides for a 14.5% pay raise for junior enlisted service members and a 4.5% increase for others. Lawmakers said those were key to improving the quality of life of service members at a time when many military families rely on food banks and other government assistance programs to make ends meet.

"It includes major quality of life improvements, enhancing things like childcare, housing, medical services, employment support for military spouses and much more," said Sen. Jack Reed, D-R.I., who chairs the Senate Armed Services Committee.

Tucked into the defense bill was also a provision to eliminate a roughly $100-a-month cut in unemployment and sickness benefits for the some 200,000 rail workers nationwide. The benefits are entirely paid for through workers' wages, but got caught up in previous budget cuts. In a rare move, the railroads joined with their unions to lobby for the change.

The legislation also directs resources towards a more confrontational approach to China, including establishing a fund that could be used to send military resources to Taiwan in much the same way that the U.S. has backed Ukraine. It also invests in new military technologies, including artificial intelligence, and bolsters the U.S. production of ammunition.

The U.S. has also moved in recent years to ban the military from purchasing Chinese products, and the defense bill extended that with prohibitions on Chinese goods from garlic in military commissaries to drone technology.

The Chinese foreign ministry responded to that move last week by calling the bans laughable.

"I don't think it could ever occur to garlic that it would pose a 'major threat' to the U.S.," said Mao Ning, a ministry spokeswoman. "From drones to cranes, from refrigerators to garlic, more and more Chinese-made products have been accused by the US of 'posing national security risks.' But has the US shown any reliable evidence or rationale to back up those accusations?"

But in Congress, Republican and Democratic lawmakers have been mostly united in their stance that China is a rising threat. Instead, it was culture war issues that divided lawmakers on the bill, which took months to negotiate.

The Republican-controlled House had passed a version of the bill in June that would have banned the Defense Department's policy of reimbursing costs for service members who travel to another state for an abortion, ended gender affirming care for transgender troops and weeded out diversity initiatives in the military.

Most of those provisions did not make it into the final package, though Republicans are expecting Donald Trump to make sweeping changes to Pentagon policy when he enters office in January.

The bill also still prohibits funding for teaching critical race theory in the military and prohibits TRICARE health plans from covering gender dysphoria treatment for children under 18 if that treatment could result in "sterilization."

Mike Zamore, the director of policy and government affairs at the American Civil Liberties Union, urged Biden to veto the bill, saying it was "forcing thousands of active-duty service members to choose between their careers in the military and the future of their transgender children."

In a floor speech, Sen. Tammy Baldwin, D-Wis., said she has always voted for the NDAA, but would not do so this year. She said that the policy change for transgender children would affect between 6,000 and 7,000 families, according to estimates her office has received.

"The NDAA has embodied the idea that there is more that brings us together than separates us, that our service members and national defense are not to be politicized. That we put our country over a party when the chips are on the table," she said. "Unfortunately, this year that was ignored—all to gut the rights of our service members to get the health care they need for their children."

Northern Marianas Technical Institute
12966 Lower Base Dr.
PO BOX 504880 Saipan, MP 96950

NMTECH

Board of Trustees
Special Board Meeting
December 20, 2024 | 9:30AM
NMTech Conference Room

MEETING AGENDA

I. Call to Order
II. Role Call
III. Adoption of Agenda
IV. Board of Trustees and NMTech Foundation Board Members Meet 'n Greet
V. Orientation to the Board
  a. CNMI Public Law 20-92
  b. Election of Officers
  c. Petition for Charter
  d. Foundation Board By-Laws
VI. Meet 'n Greet with NMTech Faculty & Staff
VII. Announcements
VIII. Adjournment

Robert Tenorio Torres (F0197)
Attorney at Law
5960 Plata Drive, Whispering Palms (Chalan Kiya)
P.O. Box 500758
Saipan, MP 96950
Tel: (670) 234-7859
Fax. (670) 234-5749
robert.torres@rttlawgroup.com

Attorneys for Plaintiffs

IN THE SUPERIOR COURT FOR THE COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS

RICHELLE CABRERA BORJA and E. J. B. T. (Minor Child) Plaintiffs, v. EUGENIO N. TENORIO Defendant.] FCD-PA CIVIL ACTION NO. 24-0336] NOTICE OF HEARING TO THE AMENDED PETITION TO INCLUDE MOTION TO TERMINATE PARENTAL RIGHTS AS TO DEFENDANT EUGENIO NAPUTI TENORIO] NEXT DATE: JANUARY 22, 2025] TIME: 1:30 PM] JUDGE: KIM-TENORIO

TO: THE GENERAL PUBLIC AND EUGENIO N. TENORIO

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that on **January 22, 2025,** at **1:30 p.m.,** a hearing will be held before Judge Teresa Kim-Tenorio on Plaintiffs Amended Petition Motion to Terminate Parental Rights as to Defendant Eugenio N. Tenorio.

Dated this 10th day of December 2024.

/s/_____
Clerk of Court/Deputy Clerk of Court

ARTICLES OF DISSOLUTION OF

Shangrui Investment Dev. Co., Ltd, a CNMI corporation. ("Corporation")

DOES HEREBY CERTIFY: SHANGRUI INVESTMENT DEV. CO., LTD

FIRST: That dissolution was authorized by the Corporation on Dec. 25, 2024

SECOND: That dissolution as been authorized in accordance with the provision of Chapter 14, Subchapter A. Section 14.02 of the CNMI Corporation Regulations.

THIRD: That process may be served against the Corporation at the following address: PMB 9 Box 10003 Saipan MP 96950

FOURTH: That a resolution proposing dissolution has been adopted and approved by the majority of the shareholders.

FIFTH: That NUMBER votes can be cast at two votes were cast in favor of this dissolution.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, said Name of Corporation has caused this Article of Dissolution to be signed by Xu, Guarong its secretary, this 19th, day of Dec. 2024.

Xu, Guorong
Secretary

ARTICLES OF DISSOLUTION OF

Apollo Corp. a CNMI corporation. ("Corporation")

DOES HEREBY CERTIFY: Apollo Corp.

FIRST: That dissolution was authorized by the Corporation on Dec. 25, 2024

SECOND: That dissolution as been authorized in accordance with the provision of Chapter 14, Subchapter A. Section 14.02 of the CNMI Corporation Regulations.

THIRD: That process may be served against the Corporation at the following address: PO Box 503667 Saipan MP 96950

FOURTH: That a resolution proposing dissolution has been adopted and approved by the majority of the shareholders.

FIFTH: That NUMBER votes can be cast at two votes were cast in favor of this dissolution.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, said Name of Corporation has caused this Article of Dissolution to be signed by Lin Quinkun, its president, this 19th, day of Dec. 2024.

Xiao, Rongkun
Secretary

Dissolved Effective: January 1, 2025

ARTICLES OF DISSOLUTION OF

Lin Xin Corp. a CNMI corporation. ("Corporation")

DOES HEREBY CERTIFY: Lin Xin Corp.

FIRST: That dissolution was authorized by the Corporation on Dec. 25, 2024

SECOND: That dissolution as been authorized in accordance with the provision of Chapter 14, Subchapter A. Section 14.02 of the CNMI Corporation Regulations.

THIRD: That process may be served against the Corporation at the following address:

FOURTH: That a resolution proposing dissolution has been adopted and approved by the majority of the shareholders.

FIFTH: That NUMBER votes can be cast at two votes were cast in favor of this dissolution.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, said Name of Corporation has caused this Article of Dissolution to be signed by Lin Huiqin, its president, this 19th, day of Dec. 2024.

Lin, Huiqin
President

ARTICLES OF DISSOLUTION OF

Hongfa Corp. a CNMI corporation. ("Corporation")

DOES HEREBY CERTIFY: Hongfa Corp.

FIRST: That dissolution was authorized by the Corporation on Dec. 25, 2024

SECOND: That dissolution as been authorized in accordance with the provision of Chapter 14, Subchapter A. Section 14.02 of the CNMI Corporation Regulations.

THIRD: That process may be served against the Corporation at the following address: PO Box 503667 Saipan MP 96950

FOURTH: That a resolution proposing dissolution has been adopted and approved by the majority of the shareholders.

FIFTH: That NUMBER votes can be cast at two votes were cast in favor of this dissolution.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, said Name of Corporation has caused this Article of Dissolution to be signed by Lin Quinkun, its president, this 19th, day of Dec. 2024.

Liu, Qiankun
President

Asia

PENTAGON SAYS

China has expanded its nuclear force, strengthened ties to Russia

WASHINGTON (AP)—China is expanding its nuclear force, has increased military pressure against Taiwan and has strengthened its ties with Russia over the past year, according to a Pentagon report Wednesday that details actions accelerating key areas of conflict with the United States.

The report, however, also notes that the recent rash of corruption allegations within China's powerful Central Military Commission, which oversees the People's Liberation Army, is hurting Beijing's military growth and could slow its campaign to modernize.

The impact, said a senior defense official, is a bit of a mixed bag because while there has been progress in some programs, China has slid back in others.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to describe the U.S. assessment, warned that Beijing is working toward developing a more diverse and technologically sophisticated nuclear force. While the expected number of nuclear warheads has maintained consistent growth, China is broadening its targeting abilities.

Beijing is going to be able to go after more and different types of targets, do greater damage and have more options for multiple rounds of counterstrikes, the official said. The U.S. is urging China to be more transparent about its nuclear program, while also warning that America will defend its allies and take appropriate steps in response.

AP

An American flag is flown next to the Chinese national emblem outside the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, Nov. 9, 2017.

According to the report, which provides the annual U.S. assessment of China's military power and is required by Congress, China had more than 600 operational nuclear warheads as of May, and the U.S. expects it will have more than 1,000 by 2030.

The Chinese Embassy, in response, said China has always "firmly adhered to a nuclear strategy of self-defense," follows the no-first-use nuclear policy and maintains its nuclear capabilities at the minimum level required for national security.

Liu Pengyu, the embassy spokesman, said such annual reports by the Pentagon are "filled with 'Cold-War' thinking and zero-sum game mentality, which China firmly opposes."

The Biden administration has worked to maintain a balance with China, building up the U.S. military presence in the Asia-Pacific region to be ready to counter Beijing while also encouraging increased communications between the two countries at the diplomatic and military levels.

That uptick in talks has coincided with a decrease in coercive and risky intercepts of U.S. aircraft since late 2023, compared with the previous two years. China still, however, does what the U.S. military considers "unsafe" flights near American and allied forces in the region.

The Pentagon's national defense strategy is built around China being the greatest security challenge for the U.S., and the threat from Beijing influences how the U.S. military is equipped and organized for the future.

The corruption within the PLA has resulted in at least 15 high-ranking officials being ousted in a major shakeup of China's defense establishment.

"This wave of corruption touches every service in the PLA, and it may have shaken Beijing's confidence," the report said.

In June, China announced that former Defense Minister Li Shangfu and his predecessor, Wei Fenghe, were expelled from the ruling Communist Party and accused of corruption. Last month, another senior official, Miao Hua, was suspended and put under investigation, according to China's Defense Ministry.

The U.S. report points to a persistent increased military presence by China around Taiwan, the self-governing island that China claims as its own. It said China's navy has been in the region more and that there have been increased crossings into the island's air defense identification zone and major military exercises in the area.

Filipina who won a last-minute reprieve from Indonesian firing squad seeks clemency

MANILA, Philippines (AP)—A Filipino woman who spent years on death row in Indonesia for drug trafficking, and who was nearly executed by firing squad in 2015, said Wednesday she's happy to be back in the Philippines but is asking its president to set her free.

Mary Jane Veloso spent almost 15 years in prison but won a last-minute reprieve that allows her to serve the rest of her sentence in the Philippines and will lead to her testimony exposing how a criminal syndicate duped her into being an unwitting accomplice and drug courier.

"What's important is I be given clemency so that I can be with my family," she told reporters at a prison facility where she was brought to after arriving in Manila, and where she had a tearful reunion with her family.

"I have been imprisoned for fifteen years in Indonesia for a crime that I did not do." she added, fighting back tears as her arm was draped on her mother's shoulder and her two sons stood close by.

Her transfer removes the possibility of execution. The Philippines, Asia's largest Roman Catholic nation, has long abolished the death penalty.

Veloso was moved late Sunday from a female prison in Yogyakarta to Indonesia's capital of Jakarta, then escorted Tuesday night to a flight to Manila. Her repatriation was made possible by a "practical arrangement" for the transfer of prisoners signed between the two countries on Dec. 6.

Relatives and a small group of supporters, including Veloso's two sons who were 1- and 6-years old when she was arrested in 2010, welcomed her with cheers and tears upon her arrival at Manila's airport.

"Welcome home Mary Jane," read a huge banner carried by relatives and supporters who were clasping flowers.

Cries rang out and the crowd waved as Veloso was escorted by a security cordon out of Manila's airport into a waiting van. Her parents wiped away tears.

"We take this opportunity to extend our gratitude to the Indonesian government and to all who have extended assistance for the welfare of Ms. Mary Jane Veloso," President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. said in statement Wednesday.

The government will ensure Veloso's safety and welfare as she continues to serve her sentence in the country, the statement added. Marcos did not mention clemency, and presidential palace officials earlier said there has been no decision about the family's appeal.

Foreign Affairs Secretary Enrique Manalo also said Wednesday that Velasco's transfer "is a significant achievement for the bilateral relations between the Philippines and Indonesia, a mark of the trust and friendship between our two nations."

Veloso told a group of reporters outside the Pondok Bambu female prison in eastern Jakarta that she was overwhelmed by a variety of emotions, before getting into the car that took her to the airport.

"Thank you, Indonesia, I love Indonesia," Veloso said.

She said that she brought many souvenirs given to her Indonesian fellow inmates and friends, including a guitar, books, knittings and rosaries.

Veloso, who will turn 40 next month, was arrested in 2010 at an airport in the Indonesian city of Yogyakarta, where officials discovered about 2.6 kilograms (5.7 pounds) of heroin hidden in her luggage. The single mother of two sons was convicted and sentenced to death.

Her case caused a public outcry in the Philippines. She traveled to Indonesia in 2010, where her recruiter, Maria Kristina Sergio, reportedly told her a job as a domestic worker awaited her. Sergio also allegedly provided the suitcase where the drugs were found.

Taipei mayor calls for less confrontation

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP)—The China-friendly mayor of Taiwan's capital, Taipei, on Tuesday called for less confrontation between the sides, even as Beijing continues to send warships and fighter jets to intimidate the self-governing island democracy.

Chiang Wan-an was speaking Tuesday at the 15th Taipei-Shanghai Twin-City Forum, which is not sanctioned by Taiwan's government, whose official position is that Taiwan is already an independent country with no reason to unify with China.

Chiang put a somewhat romantic twist on his remarks, saying "I am a Taipei mayor elected by the people. I have high expectations for whether there is peace, tension, or development across the strait. I think there should be more ... lights on fishing boats at dawn and less noise of (war) ships and (war) planes."

Between Monday and Tuesday, China sent 10 military aircraft and seven aircraft toward Taiwan, according to Taiwan's Defense Ministry. Four of the aircraft crossed the middle line of the Taiwan Strait that forms an unofficial border between the sides.

China considers Taiwan part of its territory, to be brought under its control by force if necessary, although economic ties between the sides—especially with China's financial hub of Shanghai—remain robust, with an emphasis on high-tech.

Shanghai's representative, Vice Mayor Hua Yuan, told the 102 participants that, "the people of the two sides are all one family."

Taiwan banned nine Chinese reporters from the gathering, saying they were superfluous, along with a Shanghai official for Taiwan affairs, in response to new, harsh new penalties targeting "diehard Taiwan independence separatists." Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council said Beijing's move had severely disrupted already meager bilateral exchanges and put Taiwanese residents in China at risk.

Faced with China's massive military, Taiwan has been upgrading its defenses with latest version F-16 fighter jets, missiles, submarines and artillery. On Monday, Taiwan began unloading 38 U.S.-made M1A2T tanks that represent a quantum leap in Taiwan's outdated land defenses. A further 42 of the tanks are due to be delivered next year, and at least 28 the year after.

Chiang's Nationalist Party fled to Taiwan in 1949 as Mao Zedong's Communists swept to power on the mainland and long vowed to retake the lost territory. Recent decades have seen it warm to China's more capitalist leaders, despite public opinion in Taiwan that favors the status quo of de-facto independence.

The Democratic Progressive Party—which China has refused almost all contact with since 2016—won a third consecutive four-year term in the presidential office in this year's election, but the party lost the legislature by a thin majority.

Despite the potential for friction, China has limited its actions thus far to firing missiles over the island, near daily air and sea missions and rehearsals of economic blockades that could be a precursor to a full-on invasion.

World

Assad's fall spurs hope for families split by Golan Heights buffer zone

MAJDAL SHAMS, Golan Heights (AP)—The four sisters gathered by the side of the road, craning their necks to peer far beyond the razor wire-reinforced fence snaking across the mountain. One took off her jacket and waved it slowly above her head.

In the distance, a tiny white speck waved frantically from the hillside.

"We can see you!" Soha Safadi exclaimed excitedly on her cellphone. She paused briefly to wipe away tears that had begun to flow. "Can you see us too?"

The tiny speck on the hill was Soha's sister, Sawsan. Separated by war and occupation, they hadn't seen each other in person for 22 years.

AP

Soja Safadi, center, with her sisters, tries to see their other sister, Sawsan, who is inside the buffer zone near the "Alpha Line" that separates the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights from Syria, in the town of Majdal Shams, Wednesday, Dec. 18, 2024.

The six Safadi sisters belong to the Druze community, one of the Middle East's most insular religious minorities. Its population is spread across Syria, Lebanon, Israel and the Golan Heights, a rocky plateau that Israel seized from Syria in 1967 and annexed in 1981. The U.S. is the only country to recognize Israel's control; the rest of the world considers the Golan Heights occupied Syrian territory.

Israel's seizure of the Golan Heights split families apart.

Five of the six Safadi sisters and their parents live in Majdal Shams, a Druze town next to the buffer zone created between the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights and Syria. But the sixth, 49-year-old Sawsan, married a man from Jaramana, a town on the outskirts of the Syrian capital, Damascus, 27 years ago and has lived in Syria ever since. They have land in the buffer zone, where they grow olives and apples and also maintain a small house.

With very few visits allowed to relatives over the years, a nearby hill was dubbed "Shouting Hill," where families would gather on either side of the fence and use loudspeakers to speak to each other.

The practice declined as the internet made video calls widely accessible, while the Syrian war that began in 2011 made it difficult for those on the Syrian side to reach the buffer zone.

But since the Dec. 8 fall of Syrian President Bashar Assad's regime, families like the Safadis, are starting to revive the practice. They cling to hope, however faint, that regime change will herald a loosening of restrictions between the Israeli-controlled area and Syria that have kept them from their loved ones for so long.

"It was something a bit different. You see her in person. It feels like you could be there in two minutes by car," Soha Safadi, 51, said Wednesday after seeing the speck that was her sister on the hill. "This is much better, much better."

Since Assad's fall, the sisters have been coming to the fence every day to see Sawsan. They make arrangements by phone for a specific time, and then make a video call while also trying to catch a glimpse of each other across the hill.

"She was very tiny, but I could see her," Soha Safadi said. "There were a lot of mixed feelings—sadness, joy and hope. And God willing, God willing, soon, soon, we will see her" in person.

After Assad fell, the Israeli military pushed through the buffer zone and into Syria proper. It has captured Mount Hermon, Syria's tallest mountain, known as Jabal al Sheikh in Arabic, on the slopes of which lies Majdal Shams. The buffer zone is now a hive of military and construction activity, and Sawsan can't come close to the fence.

While it is far too early to say whether years of hostile relations between the two countries will improve, the changes in Syria have sparked hope for divided families that maybe, just maybe, they might be able to meet again.

"This thing gave us a hope … that we can see each other. That all the people in the same situation can meet their families," said another sister, 53-year-old Amira Safadi.

Yet seeing Sawsan across the hill, just a short walk away, is also incredibly painful for the sisters.

They wept as they waved, and cried even more when their sister put their nephew, 24-year-old Karam, on the phone. They have only met him once, during a family reunion in Jordan. He was 2 years old.

"It hurts, it hurts, it hurts in the heart," Amira Safadi said. "It's so close and far at the same time. It is like she is here and we cannot reach her, we cannot hug her."

Israeli airstrikes hit Yemen's rebel-held capital, port city

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP)—A series of intense Israeli airstrikes shook Yemen's rebel-held capital and a port city early Thursday and killed at least nine people, officials said, shortly after a Houthi missile targeted central Israel,

The strikes further escalate Israel's campaign against the Iranian-backed Houthis, who have so far avoided the same level of intense military strikes that have targeted the Palestinian Hamas militant group and Lebanon's Hezbollah, members of Tehran's self-described "Axis of Resistance."

Meanwhile, Israel and Iran have exchanged direct fire while the government of Syria, an enemy of Israel since its founding in 1948, collapsed in the face of a rebel advance as the region's wars have upended Iran's network of allied proxy groups.

However, Thursday's strikes risk further escalating conflict with the Houthis, whose attacks on the Red Sea corridor have drastically impacted global shipping.

The Houthi-controlled satellite channel al-Masirah said that some of the strikes targeted power stations in the capital, as well as the Ras Isa oil terminal on the Red Sea. The channel, citing its correspondent in the port city of Hodeida, said at least seven people had been killed at a port, while another two had been killed at the Ras Isa oil terminal.

An Israeli military statement offered no specifics on the targets hit.

"The targets struck by the (Israeli military) were used by the Houthi forces for military purposes," the statement said. "The strikes degrade the Houthi terrorist regime, preventing it from exploiting the targets for military and terrorist purposes, including the smuggling of Iranian weapons to the region."

Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari, an Israeli military spokesman, said the strikes hit energy and port infrastructure, which he alleged the rebels "have been using in ways that effectively contributed to their military action."

"Israel will not hesitate to act in order to defend itself and its citizens from the Houthi attacks," Hagari said.

Rebel-held Hodeida, some 145 kilometers (90 miles) southwest of Sanaa, has been key for food shipments into Yemen as its decadelong war has gone on. There's also longstanding suspicion that weapons from Iran have been transferred through the port.

The strikes happened just after the Israeli military said its air force intercepted a missile launched from Yemen before it entered the country's territory.

"Rocket and missile sirens were sounded following the possibility of falling debris from the interception," the Israeli military said. Sirens sounded near Tel Aviv and the surrounding areas, and a large explosion was heard overhead at the time. The Houthis did not immediately claim the missile attack, but said an important military statement would be issued in the coming hours, following a pattern of how they claim their assaults.

Israel previously struck Hodeida and its oil infrastructure in July after a Houthi drone attack killed one person and wounded 10 in Tel Aviv.

American forces have also launched a series of strikes on the Houthis over nearly a year due to Houthi attacks on shipping in the Red Sea corridor. On Monday, the U.S. military's Central Command said it hit "a key command-and-control facility" operated by the Houthis in Sanaa, later identified as the al-Ardi complex once home to the government's Defense Ministry. But Israel appears to have carried out Thursday's strikes alone.

NATO chief wants to put Ukraine in position of strength for any peace talks with Russia

BRUSSELS (AP)—NATO's secretary-general said he wants to discuss ways to put Ukraine in a position of strength for any future peace talks with Russia during a meeting Wednesday with Ukraine's president and a small number of European leaders.

But Mark Rutte appeared frustrated at growing speculation in NATO capitals about when those peace talks might start and whether European peacekeepers would be involved, saying that speaking publicly about it plays into the hands of Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"High on the agenda is to make sure that the president, his team in Ukraine, are in the best possible position one day when they decide so to start the peace talks," Rutte told reporters as he welcomed Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to his residence in Brussels.

The focus, Rutte said, must be "to do everything now to make sure that when it comes to air defense, when it comes to other weapons systems, that we make sure that we provide whatever we can."

He said that another issue up for discussion would be "how to make sure that when peace comes one day that we also think about the economy of Ukraine now, but also after a future peace deal."

Zelenskyy posted on Telegram that he would hold talks with the leaders of the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Italy, Denmark, the Netherlands and Poland and U.K. representatives, who were in Brussels. He's also due to take part in an EU summit in the Belgian capital on Thursday.

Zelenskyy that the meeting would provide "a very good opportunity to speak about security guarantees for Ukraine, for today and for tomorrow." Ukraine sees NATO membership as the ultimate security guarantee, but the U.S. and Germany lead a group of countries that oppose this while war continues.

After separate talks with Zelenskyy, French President Emmanuel Macron said his country is making reinforced support for Ukraine its "absolute priority" and will continue giving Ukraine "the means to defend itself and to make Russia's war of aggression fail," according to Macron's office.

Noting his recent meeting with Trump and Zelenskyy, Macron said he will maintain a "tight dialogue with Ukraine and its international partners to work for a return to a fair and lasting peace," the statement said.

At NATO headquarters earlier, Rutte had said the terms of any peace talks should be up to Ukraine, Russia and any others at the negotiating table. "If we now start to discuss amongst ourselves what a deal could look like, we make it so easy for the Russians," he said.

"I think we would be very wise to put some lid on this and focus on the business at hand, and the business at hand is to make sure that Ukraine has what it needs to prevent Putin from winning," Rutte added.

Life & Style

Mariah Carey's 'Christmas Time' comes to an end: See pictures from the holiday tour

Mariah Carey is the Queen of Christmas for a reason—and not just because "All I Want for Christmas Is You" tops the charts seasonally.

Carey has turned the song into an event, regularly hosting Christmas concerts to celebrate her undisputed smash and long career as a holiday icon. This year, she embarked on the "Christmas Time" tour, a variety show that kicked off on Nov. 6 in Highland, California, hitting many major North American cities, before concluding on Tuesday night at Barclays Center in Brooklyn.

It came to an end in front of a crowd donning shimmery Santa hats and red sequin party dresses. Carey descended onto the stage in a snowflake-shaped throne, leading the audience into a few church staples: "Silent Night" and "O Holy Night" among them.

Her children, twins Roc and Roe, joined in on the fun. At one point, Carey detoured into a medley of her biggest hits: "Emotions," "Hero," "Fantasy," and "We Belong Together" among them.

AP

Mariah Carey performs on Tuesday, Dec. 17, 2024, at Barclays Center in Brooklyn, N.Y.

The latter moment came with an unexpected surprise: the elusive Rihanna was in the audience, and Carey signed her chest during an arena-wide sing-a-long of "Always Be My Baby." Ri disappeared as quickly as she emerged, but Carey kept the momentum up, concluding the only way she could—with a spirited rendition of "All I Want for Christmas Is You."

Earlier this year, Carey's first Christmas album, 1994's "Merry Christmas," turned 30. She told The Associated Press she originally felt apprehensive to record a holiday album and then gave in to the festive spirit.

"I was very young and was just starting out and I felt like people do Christmas albums later in their lives. But now people have started to do them whenever, like right at the top of their career," she said. "And I decorated the studio and just had the best time." ***(AP)***

Pharrell Williams is named a UNESCO goodwill ambassador

PARIS (AP)—Pop star and fashion designer Pharrell Williams was named UNESCO's goodwill ambassador for artistic education and entrepreneurship on Tuesday in Paris, continuing his cultural dominance of the French capital as Louis Vuitton menswear artistic director and performer at Notre Dame Cathedral's reopening earlier this month.

Williams said he hoped to "deepen that sense of unity and togetherness" in work that "evens the odds for marginalized communities."

He also spoke about his impoverished youth, adding: "Growing up in Virginia, never in my wildest dreams did I think I would be given an opportunity like this one."

The role of goodwill ambassador for the Paris-based U.N. cultural agency involves promoting its initiatives that include protecting Indigenous cultures, advancing education and health care for women, raising awareness about genocide prevention and safeguarding cultural heritage.

The U.N. agency said Williams will be "a mentor and role model for young creators, particularly in Africa, where UNESCO supports the development of cultural industries."

Williams joins a list of goodwill ambassadors that includes U.S. jazz musician Herbie Hancock, Brazilian artist Vik Muniz and Japanese filmmaker Naomi Kawase.

Williams has been particularly visible in Paris this year. Shortly before the Paris Olympics, his role as Louis Vuitton menswear designer took center stage during a star-studded event at UNESCO's headquarters. The show, celebrating the beauty of human skin, featured models wearing garments in shades representing the diverse hues of humanity.

UNESCO leaders hope that Williams' global influence and deep connections to fashion and music will draw fresh attention to the agency's work.

Williams is American, and his selection as goodwill ambassador also may be highlighting the readmission of the United States to UNESCO last year.

Jay-Z's lawyers challenge rapper's inclusion in rape lawsuit after accuser's TV interview

NEW YORK (AP)—Jay-Z's lawyers asked a judge Wednesday to speedily extract the rapper from a lawsuit in which a woman alleges she was sexually assaulted by Jay-Z and Sean 'Diddy' Combs when she was 13.

The unidentified woman recently added Jay-Z, whose legal name is Shawn Carter, to her lawsuit against Combs in Manhattan federal court, alleging that she was attacked by the singers in 2000 after Combs' limo driver offered her a ride to an MTV Video Music Awards after-party.

In their court filing Wednesday, Jay-Z's lawyers cited a recent television interview in which the woman acknowledged inconsistencies in her story.

The filing came before Combs appeared for a pretrial hearing in his criminal case. After lawyers discussed evidentiary deadlines, prosecutors told Judge Arun Subramanian that any new charges against the hip-hop mogul before a May trial would require minimal new evidence to be shared among lawyers.

In the criminal case, Combs has pleaded not guilty to charges that the Bad Boy Records founder coerced and abused women for years with help from associates and employees. Combs, who has been jailed without bail for three months, hugged his lawyers and touched his heart as he acknowledged his children among spectators.

In the civil case, one of several filed against him, the woman originally asserted that she was raped by Combs at the after-party but did not mention Jay-Z.

AP

Rap moguls Sean "Diddy" Combs, left, and Jay-Z attend the NBA All-Star basketball game, Feb. 15, 2015, in New York.

Son's wife prefers the company of her phone during visits

DEAR ABBY: When my son got married in 2003, we had many good times with him and his wife. Things have changed now that we have cellphones. It's nearly impossible to have a relationship with her because when they come to our home, she's always on her phone! My son talks to his dad, and I'm left sitting there wondering what I should do.

Would you say anything to your daughter-in-law about this? She immediately gets on the phone when she arrives and stays on it most of the time. It wasn't like this when cellphones weren't as prolific. It hurts my feelings that she comes all the way to my house only to socialize with her Facebook friends and not us, because we rarely see them.

Should I speak up? I don't want to start trouble and I don't want to isolate them. I love them, but I think it's rude that she's on her phone the whole time they're here. It makes me feel like I'm not good enough for her to talk to me. I have two other daughters-in-law who may get on their phones occasionally, but not like this one.

OFF THE PHONE IN KENTUCKY

DEAR OFF: Of course what your daughter-in-law is doing is rude. It is also insensitive. It won't stop unless you and your husband say something. When you do, do not couch your message in terms of being "rude." Instead, tell her it hurts your feelings and gives you the impression that she doesn't value your company as much as you do hers. It also impedes high-quality visiting. If you express it this way, it may make her less defensive, because it is the truth.

■■■■

DEAR ABBY: My fiance and I have been together for many years. I have never really liked his mother -- for valid reasons. She belittles and is disrespectful to her son. The last straw was when she came by two months ago and made a derogatory comment about him to me. (He was not present.) It was false, and I called her out on it. She, of course, had no rebuttal. She is negative even in her personal life and often lies.

I talked to my fiance about this, and he does address the issues with her, but not in a way that makes her understand she must either respect him or risk no longer having a relationship with him. She uses others, is two-faced and rarely bathes. I am considering breaking off our engagement at this point. I'm tired of this woman's lack of respect. Should I walk away from this relationship?

DISGUSTED AND APPALLED IN THE EAST

DEAR DISGUSTED: If your tolerance level has reached its limit, you may have to walk away. However, I do not think you should give your fiance an ultimatum in which he must decide between you and his mother. As obnoxious and odiferous as she is, she is still his mother. I do think you should suggest that he talk with a licensed psychotherapist about his relationship with her. If it is as unhealthy as you have described, he might then, on his own, decide to distance himself from her.

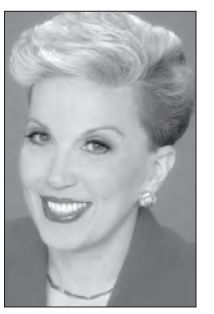
■■■■

Good advice for everyone – teens to seniors – is in "The Anger in All of Us and How to Deal With It." To order, send your name and mailing address, plus check or money order for $8 (U.S. funds) to: Dear Abby, Anger Booklet, P.O. Box 447, Mount Morris, IL 61054-0447. (Shipping and handling are included in the price.)

DEAR ABBY

By ABIGAIL VAN BUREN

UNIVERSAL PRESS SYNDICATE

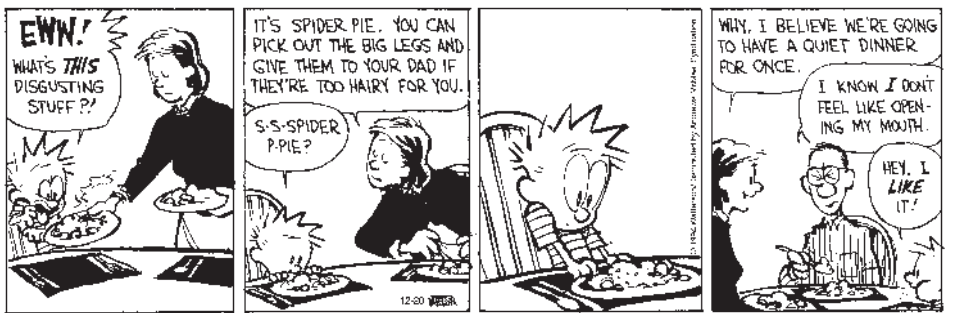


Dear Abby is written by Abigail Van Buren, also known as Jeanne Phillips, and was founded by her mother, Pauline Phillips. Contact Dear Abby at www.DearAbby.com or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, CA 90069.

Pastimes

Calvin and Hobbes

By Bill Waterson


EWW! WHAT'S THIS DISGUSTING STUFF?!
IT'S SPIDER PIE. YOU CAN PICK OUT THE BIG LEGS AND GIVE THEM TO YOUR DAD IF THEY'RE TOO HAIRY FOR YOU.
S-S-SPIDER P-PIE?
WHY, I BELIEVE WE'RE GOING TO HAVE A QUIET DINNER FOR ONCE.
I KNOW I DON'T FEEL LIKE OPENING MY MOUTH.
HEY, I LIKE IT!

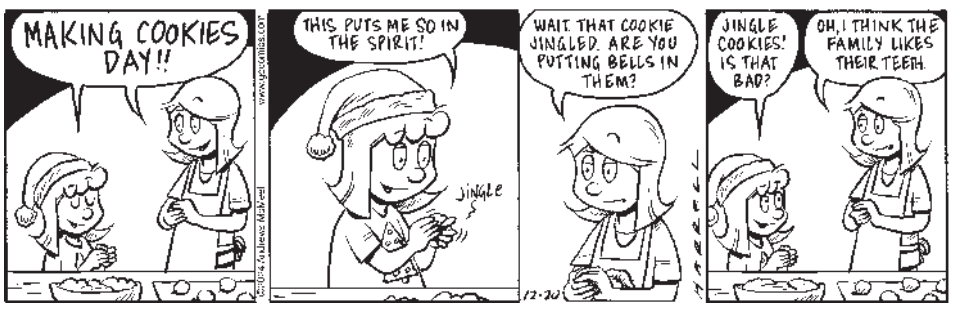
Garfield®

By Jim Davis

DEAR SANTA, I HAVE BEEN EXTRA GOOD THIS YEAR
WHEN YOU BRING PRESENTS ON CHRISTMAS EVE...
CAN YOU ALSO DELIVER A PIZZA?
I LIKE THE WAY THIS KID THINKS!

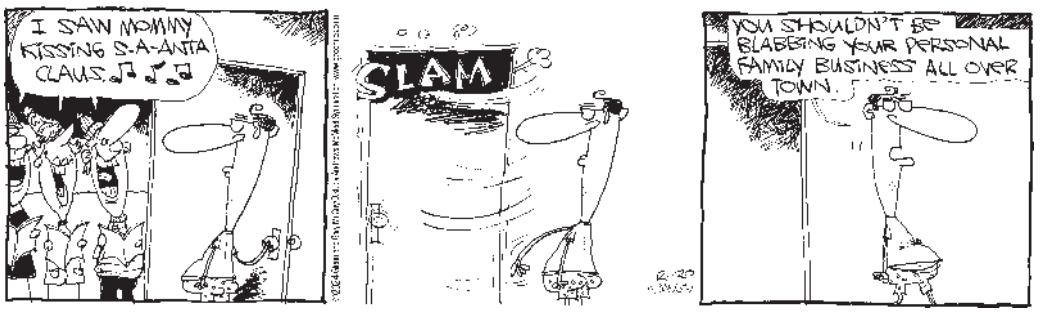
Adam@home

By Bryan Basset


MAKING COOKIES DAY!!
THIS PUTS ME SO IN THE SPIRIT!
JINGLE
WAIT. THAT COOKIE JINGLED. ARE YOU PUTTING BELLS IN THEM?
JINGLE COOKIES! IS THAT BAD?
OH, I THINK THE FAMILY LIKES THEIR TEETH.

The Duplex

By Glenn McCoy



CROSSWORD

By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS

1 River blocker
4 Buddies
8 Study all night
12 Mouths (Lat.)
13 Guitarist Clapton
14 Bylaws, briefly
15 Warming winter quaff
17 Tied
18 Cling (to)
19 "— the season ..."
21 Cacophony
22 "Oh boy!"
26 Bamboo eater
29 Hamilton bill
30 Ruckus
31 Follow orders
32 Walgreens alternative
33 Nile queen, informally
34 Plant seeds
35 Auto fuel
36 Winning
37 Chinese stew
39 Roman 56
40 Sinbad's bird
41 Dawn-of-mammals epoch
45 Pisa farewell
48 Ski lodge cupful
50 Tel —
51 Buffalo's county
52 Guffaw syllable
53 Pianist Peter
54 Monthly payment
55 Surprised cries

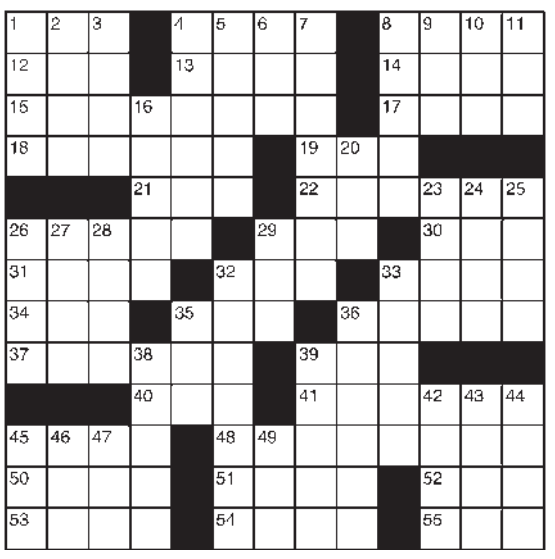
DOWN

1 Qatari capital
2 Yankee nickname
3 Algebra or trig
4 Illinois city
5 "As You Like It" setting
6 Cover
7 Wheat cutters
8 Top of a wave
9 Gun the engine
10 Get older
11 AOL rival
16 Kennedy or Roosevelt
20 Physics particle
23 Valley
24 Classic theaters
25 Suitable
26 Ritzy
27 "Peek-—!"
28 Salamander
29 Boob tubes
32 Ballpark figure
33 Brother of Groucho
35 Sticky stuff
36 Long-legged shorebird
38 Utah city
39 Admit
42 Reverberate
43 Ham's dad
44 Jug handles
45 Soda container
46 "— had it!"
47 Football filler
49 Mine yield

Solution time: 25 mins.

E	D	A	M		T	E	R	M		E	T	C
L	I	C	E		U	N	T	O		I	R	A
C	V	E	R	G	R	E	E	N		G	I	N
C	A	R	L	I	N			T	A	H	O	E
			O	Γ		S	L	E	P	T		
A	M	A	T		T	E	E		P	E	A	R
N	A	R			E	V	A			E	D	U
A	H	E	M		T	E	N		S	N	A	G
		R	A	T	E	R		O	H			
M	E	D	I	A			B	A	A	R	A	A
A	L	E		I	N	B	E	T	W	E	E	N
I	S	E		L	A	R	S		L	I	R	E
D	E	N		S	E	C	T		S	T	O	W

Yesterday's answer 12-20



STUMPED? For answers to today's crossword, call **1-900-226-5955!** 99¢ per minute, touch-tone/rotary phones. (18+ only.) A King Features service, NYC.

CELEBRITIES BORN ON THIS DAY: Jonah Hill, 41; David Cook, 42; Nicole de Boer, 54; Joel Gretsch, 61.

Happy Birthday: Take your time, look for opportunities and refuse to let other people's drama drag you down. Patience, hard work, charm and congeniality will help you advance. Pay attention to relationships and weed out negative connections that drain your energy. It's time to call the shots instead of giving others the authority to choose for you. It's time to step into the spotlight and own the stage. Your numbers are 4, 15, 23, 27, 34, 41, 47.

ARIES *(March 21-April 19):* Dress for success and strut your stuff. Social events will lead to chance meetings and various opportunities to ponder. Travel, learning experiences and conversations will help you grasp new possibilities. A chance to donate or support a cause or someone you care about will lead to unexpected rewards. ✪✪✪

TAURUS *(April 20-May 20):* A change or proposal someone makes will take you by surprise. Before you jump at a potential opportunity, do your research. Stay calm and carefully pick and choose the venues you attend. Don't jeopardize your health or take a risk that can result in an argument or injury. ✪✪✪✪

GEMINI *(May 21-June 20):* A positive attitude will prevent emotional friction. When in doubt, take a pass and do something you can easily handle. Let your charm lead the way, and let your gestures be your calling card. Sport a trendy new look and enjoy the festivities in your community. Romance is favored. ✪✪

CANCER *(June 21-July 22):* A reserved attitude will pay off. The information you receive will be exaggerated. Take your time and verify what you hear before you react. Trust your intuition, and you will avoid being taken advantage of financially. Engage in creative endeavors or spend more time with someone you love. ✪✪✪✪

LEO *(July 23-Aug. 22):* High energy will help you get things done, allowing you to move on to entertaining activities and engaging in stimulating conversations that pique your interest. Your enthusiasm will lead to opportunities and a chance to meet with someone who can alter your life. Romance is in the stars. ✪✪✪

VIRGO *(Aug. 23-Sept. 22):* Set guidelines, boundaries and a budget when dealing with people who don't reveal their intentions but are pressuring you to join forces. Put more time, money and thought into what matters most and how you want to use your skills and cash moving forward. Be bold and move forward alone. ✪✪✪

LIBRA *(Sept. 23-Oct. 22):* You'll have plenty to discuss once you let down your guard and feel comfortable with someone of interest. Social and networking events will allow you to meet interesting people and show off what you can offer. An opportunity to learn, travel or connect romantically looks promising. ✪✪✪✪

SCORPIO *(Oct. 23-Nov. 21):* Know your limits and your opponents. Think outside the box, and you'll devise a surefire way to outmaneuver someone trying to take advantage of you. Trust your instincts, refuse to let anger surface and set your radar on your goal instead of wasting time on nonsense. ✪✪✪✪

SAGITTARIUS *(Nov. 22-Dec. 21):* Take a long, hard look at what's important to you and how to preserve what matters most, and let go of the past. It's time to turn the page and create and embrace opportunities that excite you. Attending a reunion will help you redefine your role and purpose. ✪✪✪

EUGENIA LAST

THE LAST WORD IN ASTROLOGY

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CAPRICORN *(Dec. 22-Jan. 19):* Emotions and money won't mix. You can't buy love and shouldn't waste your time trying to please someone who doesn't reciprocate. Change begins with looking at the facts, adjusting your mindset and returning to the pastimes that make you feel good about yourself. Be open to trying something new. ✪✪✪✪

AQUARIUS *(Jan. 20-Feb. 18):* Home improvements will make your life easier. Open your doors to friends and family, and you'll gain access to valuable information and an opportunity to get to know someone better. Love, romance and personal gain are in the stars and will encourage you to participate in something new and exciting. ✪✪✪

PISCES *(Feb. 19-March 20):* Showing respect may win you favors, but truth and honesty will buy you dignity and support from those who count. Know when to avoid temptation, put ego aside and turn a negative into a positive. Don't let uncertainty weigh heavy on your mind; take the high road. ✪✪✪

Birthday Baby: You are quick-witted, entertaining and appealing. You are helpful and sensitive.

✪: Avoid conflicts; work behind the scenes. ✪✪: You can accomplish, but don't rely on others. ✪✪✪: Focus and you'll reach your goals. ✪✪✪✪: Aim high; start new projects. ✪✪✪✪✪: Nothing can stop you; go for gold.

SUDOKU

Conceptis Sudoku *By Dave Green*

3					6			1
8	4	2						
				3	7			
	5		2			1	7	
		8		6	5			
6						4	5	
	6				9		1	
						7		9
			7			3		4

Difficulty: ★★★★ 12/20

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Sudoku is a number-placing puzzle based on a 9x9 grid with several given numbers. The object is to place the numbers 1 to 9 in the empty squares so that each row, each column and each 3x3 box contains the same number only once. The difficulty level of the Conceptis Sudoku increases from Monday to Saturday.

Yesterday's Answer

5	7	6	9	8	2	3	1	4
2	1	4	5	6	3	8	9	7
9	3	8	4	7	1	2	6	5
6	2	1	8	3	4	5	7	9
4	5	3	2	9	7	1	8	6
7	8	9	6	1	5	4	3	2
1	9	2	7	5	8	6	4	3
3	6	5	1	4	9	7	2	8
8	4	7	3	2	6	9	5	1

Difficulty: ★★★ 12/19

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WONDERWORD®

By DAVID OUELLET

HOW TO PLAY: All the words listed below appear in the puzzle — horizontally, vertically, diagonally and even backward. Find them, circle each letter of the word and strike it off the list. The leftover letters spell the **WONDERWORD.**

TV WALL MOUNTS Solution: 6 letters

M	O	U	N	T	E	D	R	E	L	A	X	S	C	G
Y	E	E	E	C	A	P	S	I	Z	E	N	E	A	L
E	E	D	G	N	I	R	I	W	E	R	R	G	B	A
C	R	L	I	N	C	H	E	S	I	U	G	U	L	R
Y	N	I	L	A	I	T	L	I	T	N	F	L	E	E
T	O	P	W	U	U	L	R	C	I	I	G	P	R	T
I	I	Y	A	L	P	S	I	D	X	C	A	U	R	E
L	T	C	L	N	O	P	N	E	U	C	S	O	D	K
I	C	O	L	U	E	A	D	R	C	A	T	E	L	C
B	E	R	N	L	T	L	V	E	E	Ⓐ	Ⓡ	Ⓜ	O	O
I	L	D	E	S	H	E	S	M	T	T	A	L	F	S
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Lillard, Antetokounmpo won an NBA Cup together

LAS VEGAS (AP)—Damian Lillard and Giannis Antetokounmpo stood side-by-side during the postgame celebration after the NBA Cup final. Antetokounmpo was holding the MVP trophy. Lillard was holding the bigger trophy.

And it was a moment that Lillard had waited a long time to savor.

He's been a rookie of the year, a 3-point contest champion, an All-Star MVP, even a member of the league's 75th anniversary team. And while his biggest goal is still winning an NBA championship, the significance of winning the NBA Cup was not lost on the 13-year veteran.

"I've had a lot of experience individually where I've had accomplishments and stuff," Lillard said after the Bucks beat the Oklahoma City Thunder 97-81 on Tuesday night in the Cup final. "But to have some team success and win something and be the last team standing in this tournament, it feels great."

AP

Milwaukee Bucks forward Giannis Antetokounmpo (34) bites his NBA Cup medal after his team's victory in the championship game of the NBA Cup basketball tournament against the Oklahoma City Thunder Tuesday, Dec. 17, 2024, in Las Vegas.

The Bucks have a championship coach in Doc Rivers, the core of a team that won a title in 2021—Antetokounmpo, Khris Middleton, Brook Lopez, Bobby Portis and Pat Connaughton among them—and one of the game's elite guards in Lillard. Starting 1-6 and 2-8 this year might have raised some eyebrows, but the Bucks insisted that they never doubted themselves.

They've been one of the league's hottest teams since that awful start and rolled through the in-season tournament with a 7-0 record. Winning the NBA Cup might be a reminder—perhaps an unnecessary one—of the Bucks' potential.

"I think it reminds us that we can beat anybody," Rivers said. "And we don't care if it tells everybody else that. We only care about us. It's what I said on the first day of camp. I also said we can lose to anybody if we don't play right."

Antetokounmpo and Lillard are leading the way, and that can't be a surprise.

Both are playing at their perennial All-Star level. They're the highest-scoring duo in the league, combining to average more than 58 points per game. They were the best two players on the floor in the NBA Cup final, Antetokounmpo getting a triple-double—26 points, 19 rebounds and 10 assists—on his way to MVP honors, and Lillard scoring 23.

» Now, the next challenge: chasing the big prize

Year 1 of their pairing after Lillard wound up in Milwaukee after 11 years in Portland wasn't perfect. It was good, not great. Year 2 is clearly better. It's another sign of what might be for the Bucks going forward.

"People wanted to put me with Giannis and think it was just going to be perfect right away because we've both been high-level players," Lillard said. "But I come from a situation where I've always had the ball, and he's had a decade of him having the ball and playing a certain way.

"I think time is the No. 1 thing," he added. "It just took time for us to get to know each other better as people. You can't just trust somebody that you're paired with when you don't really know who they are, how they think and how they operate. So, I think time has helped us."

Time has helped Lillard as well.

He averaged 24.3 points and 7 assists per game last year. Those are all-world numbers for just about anyone. He didn't think much of how he played, though, and he never got to the point of feeling totally comfortable in a new role, a new place, with a new team.

He does now.

"Getting healthy, getting my training in and having my mind right coming back into the season was all it really was for me," Lillard said. "When we lost in the playoffs last year, I said it right after the game. 'People will see.'"

Seeing is believing.

There's still more than two-thirds of the regular season left. Cleveland—Milwaukee's first opponent when the Bucks return to regular-season play on Friday—and defending NBA champion Boston have clearly been the best two teams in the Eastern Conference to this point. There are tons of challenges ahead and there surely will be plenty of ebbs and flows.

"I'm so happy for Dame that we got our first trophy together," Antetokounmpo said. "This is just the beginning. We have to keep on improving and getting better, and we will be better."

Popovich expresses desire to return to bench in first comments since stroke

SAN ANTONIO (AP)—San Antonio Spurs coach Gregg Popovich intends to return to coaching, he said Monday in his first public comments since suffering a stroke in early November.

Popovich, the NBA's career coaching wins leader, released a statement through the Spurs expressing gratitude for the support he has received in recent weeks. He had what the Spurs said was a mild stroke about 2 1/2 hours prior to the team's home game against Minnesota on Nov. 2.

There is no timetable for his return to coaching, though the Spurs have said doctors expect Popovich to make a full recovery.

"This has certainly been an unexpected six weeks for my family and me," Popovich said. "As we work together on my recovery, I want to take a moment to share that the outpouring of support we've received during this time has been truly overwhelming in the best possible way.

"While I wish I could get back to each one of you, for now, let me say that my family and I are forever grateful. We're thankful for our wonderful community, the entire Spurs organization, and our family and friends."

The 75-year-old Popovich has led the Spurs to five championships and guided the United States to a gold medal at the Tokyo Olympics in 2021. He is in his 29th season as coach of the Spurs.

NBA Cup final was a contrast in spending styles, and the league is just fine with that

LAS VEGAS (AP)—The NBA Cup finalists had different styles in how they play. And how they spend.

Tuesday night's title game in Las Vegas between Milwaukee and Oklahoma City pitted a team in the Bucks that's over the NBA's second apron—a threshold that, once exceeded, limits ways that teams can trade for or sign players—and a team in the Thunder below the first apron.

In NBA Commissioner Adam Silver's eyes, that might be fitting.

"I think it's great for the new (collective bargaining agreement)," Silver said Tuesday in a meeting with reporters before the NBA Cup title game , which Milwaukee won 97-81. "At the same time, there is a correlation between success on the floor and spending—and that's the reason behind the second apron. We're not trying to make any secret out of it."

The aprons are certainly going to limit how some teams make trades in the coming months. Earlier this season, when Minnesota and New York were trying to finalize the trade that sent Karl-Anthony Towns to the Knicks, Timberwolves basketball operations president Tim Connelly said the new CBA rules were complex to navigate.

"The new rules … some of the consequences are unintended, quite frankly," Connelly said this fall. "I don't know if anyone intended to make it this challenging to make moves, to make trades when you're above certain aprons."

Silver reiterated that the league knew what some of the new challenges would be.

"I understand the frustration of some of the general managers because particularly if you go over the apron, we've cut down on your flexibility," Silver said Tuesday. "But that was the very intent of the second apron and with the goal being to have a better distribution of star talent around the league. And I think we've been successful in doing that."

It's the league's stance that big-market and big-spending teams can win, and smaller-market and lesser-spending teams can do the same. Milwaukee is one of four teams currently over the second apron, along with Boston, Phoenix and Minnesota.

"There's many different ways to win," Silver said.

Cup final future

The NBA Cup is coming back next season. The question is if the NBA Cup is coming back to Las Vegas.

The NBA's new broadcast agreements begin next season, and one of the league's new partners—Amazon—will be covering the knockout round of the tournament. But there's been no decision on where the 2025 title game will be played.

"There has been some interest expressed by teams in playing in the home markets," Silver said. "It's complicated enough scheduling a neutral site. I'm not against playing in our markets.

He said the question to figure out is how it would work a scheduling standpoint. There's a flip side of the coin, that being the league has liked how the first two years of the event have been received in Las Vegas.

"You start to build in tradition, you have a lot of fans who can circle these dates on their calendar and plan to come to Las Vegas, plan a holiday around it," Silver said. "I think the teams are on both sides. I think they like the idea of winning that opportunity to play at home. But then you've got to move tickets very short term. We have some experience doing that in the playoffs, but this is a little bit different."

But if Bucks coach Doc Rivers gets a vote, it'd stay in Vegas.

"Right here. Right here," Rivers said after his team won the title Tuesday night. "Listen, I was proven wrong in a very good way. I was worried that if a (Los Angeles) team wasn't in the Cup we couldn't get enough people in the crowd. And the people from Las Vegas showed up. It was packed today and that's huge—not only for Vegas, but for the league."

Chargers host Broncos with both teams closing in on playoff spots

EL SEGUNDO, Calif. (AP)—Bo Nix and Justin Herbert have tried to keep their focus squarely on Thursday night's pivotal AFC West showdown between the Denver Broncos and Los Angeles Chargers.

Both quarterbacks realize though what a win would do in regards to their postseason chances.

Nix and Denver (9-5) have won four straight and would return to the playoffs for the first time since 2015 with a victory at SoFi Stadium.

Even though a win in one of the next three games extends Denver's season for at least one week, that's not the way Nix is looking at it.

According to the NFL, a loss by Denver would leave its probability at 85% with remaining games at Cincinnati on Dec. 28 and Kansas City in Week 18.

"We've got three games to win three and go into the playoffs and win a Super Bowl," he said.

AP

Denver Broncos' Bo Nix throws during the first half of an NFL football game against the Indianapolis Colts Sunday, Dec. 15, 2024, in Denver.

Herbert and Los Angeles (8-6) are reeling with losses in three of its past four. Yet, it would wrap up its second postseason berth in three seasons with a win plus losses or ties by Miami and Indianapolis.

"The past couple of games have been felt like playoff games where they're important and have that environment where at any moment something big can happen," Herbert said. "That's on us to be able to handle that environment, continue to go through it and realize the importance of these games."

The Chargers would have a 97% probability of making the playoffs with a win compared to 73% if they lost.

Los Angeles closes the season with road games against New England and Las Vegas, but would be favored in both.

The Chargers are looking to sweep the season series for the first time since 2010, which would give them the tiebreaker if both teams had the same record. The Bolts go into Week 16 as the AFC's seventh seed, which would mean a trip to Buffalo or Kansas City in the wild-card round.

The Broncos hold the sixth seed, which would likely be a trip to AFC North winner Pittsburgh or Baltimore.

"We know where we stand as a team, we control our own destiny. This Thursday everything we want is right in front of us and it starts with a division game," Chargers safety Derwin James said.

Thursday night flex

This is the first time a game has been flexed to Thursday night. NFL owners approved a two-year trial last year where up to two games in Weeks 13 through 17 could be flexed to the Amazon Prime Video package with at least 28 days notice prior to the game.

It wasn't used last year, but needed to this season to see the effects. The AFC North matchup between the Cleveland Browns and Cincinnati Bengals was bumped to Sunday afternoon.

The Chargers were one of six teams not to have a Thursday game when the NFL schedule was released in May.

The Broncos are the first team to have two road Thursday games immediately after a Sunday game since 1926.

"I just think we as coaches have learned a lot about how to play these games maybe differently than when we were first doing it," Denver coach Sean Payton said. "I think it's important to really look closely at not over installing. Making sure the guys know what they're getting by heart. Plays that they know."

Bo's big rebound

Nix had his first three-interception game as a pro Sunday and Denver produced just seven points in its first nine drives against the Colts. But Nix bounced back and led the Broncos to 17 points in the final 20 minutes for a 31-13 blowout.

"Later in that game when we needed him he didn't flinch," Payton said. "There's a maturity and a moxie about him that I love. And I think it's contagious to the team, and when you have that at the quarterback position, you know you're in every game. And when you don't have it, that's pretty difficult because deep down in their bellies they know that's not the case."

Stuck in neutral

The Chargers lack of playmakers at the offensive skill positions has been apparent over the past three games with running back J.K. Dobbins on injured reserve because of a knee injury.

Los Angeles ran the ball on 44.4% of its plays before Dobbins' injury. That rate has decreased to 33.1% of its snaps against Atlanta, Kansas City and Tampa Bay.

Herbert is also dealing with a sprained left ankle. While the injury is not as severe as when he sprained his right ankle at Carolina on Sept. 15, it has led to offensive coordinator Greg Roman leaving certain plays off his call sheet.

"I don't know if I'd be able to put an exact percentage on it. I know it is better than it was last week and as long as we're going in that direction," Herbert said.

Bills' Josh Allen credits fiancee Hailee Steinfeld with influencing MVP-caliber season

ORCHARD PARK, N.Y. (AP)—The reason Josh Allen is making his NFL MVP case this season while playing with such joyful abandon is obvious to Buffalo Bills left tackle Dion Dawkins.

It must be love.

"There's something about it," Dawkins said Wednesday, referring to the quarterback's recent engagement to actor/singer Hailee Steinfeld.

"When you're in this world that we're in, and a lot of people pulling at you and a lot of sources of ups and downs of a roller coaster, and you have that one stable person that you can rely on and go home and hug and get a laugh no matter what, I think that's dope," Dawkins said. "And that's what I think is going on."

Allen didn't deny it.

"She's been a huge part. The morale, the support. When I get home, she's my biggest fan, my biggest supporter. She's just the best," Allen told The Associated Press.

Allen and the Bills (11-3) have been on a roll for much of this season and host the New England Patriots (3-11) on Sunday. With five games remaining, Buffalo clinched its fifth straight AFC East title, defeated AFC-leading Kansas City (13-1) and is coming off a 48-42 win over Detroit (12-2).

What's curious is how the quarterback has stepped up his game to an even higher level since proposing to Steinfeld on Nov. 22 during the Bills' bye week.

In the three games since, Allen has combined for 14 touchdowns—seven passing, six rushing and one receiving on a pass he completed to Amari Cooper, who lateraled it back to the quarterback. And it would've been 15 TDs if his basketball-like chest pass over a flat-footed Detroit defender to a wide-open tight end Dalton Kincaid in the end zone had not been negated by an offensive holding penalty.

AP

Buffalo Bills quarterback Josh Allen (17) runs against the Detroit Lions during the second half of an NFL football game, Sunday, Dec. 15, 2024, in Detroit.

Overall, Allen's 37 total TDs are tied for the NFL lead with Lamar Jackson and Joe Burrow. On Sunday, he became the first NFL player to throw at least three touchdown passes and rush for at least two more in consecutive games.

The Bills, meanwhile, have combined for 90 points in their past two, including a 44-42 loss to the Los Angeles Rams, and scored 30 or more in eight straight to match a single-season NFL record last set by Denver in 2013.

Offensive coordinator Joe Brady joked that he wants to incorporate some of Allen's trick plays into practice to show they're actually part of the game plan.

"It would make us look like better coaches," Brady said.

"But I mean, that's him, right? He throws passes to himself. And then he can chest pass, and we'll see what's next," he added. "He's having a lot of fun playing out there. He's in great control, great command, all the confidence in the world in him, and why not?"

Allen's relationship with Steinfeld began in the spring of 2023, when pictures emerged of the two having dinner in New York City.

Steinfeld, who was nominated for an Academy Award for her role in the 2010 remake of "True Grit," has since become a regular at Bills games. The couple have posted pictures of themselves in Paris and hosting a Halloween party.

Without mentioning Steinfeld, the 28-year-old Allen acknowledged he's playing the best football of his seven-year NFL career while enjoying himself at the same time.

"I'm just playing this game, the same game that I've been playing since I was a little kid. And that's kind of what it comes down to," Allen said. "What I get to do is really fun, and I want to have as much fun as possible."

Dawkins sees that positive energy rubbing off on the team.

"Everybody's smiling. We're not just smiling because it's Christmas. We're not just smiling because we're winning, but because the energy is right," he said. "Josh is the head of our football team. When that is right, everything is right."

Yankees moved on quickly after losing Soto; Sasaki could be next

NEW YORK (AP)—In pivoting to Plan B after losing Juan Soto, Brian Cashman went after a familiar name in Cody Bellinger.

"I acquired his dad back in the day. Now I acquired his son," the New York Yankees general manager said Wednesday.

In the first 10 days after Soto spurned the Yankees for a record $765 million, 15-year contract with the Mets, the Yankees signed left-hander Max Fried to a $218 million, eight-year contract, acquired closer Devin Williams from the Milwaukee Brewers and obtained Bellinger, a former NL MVP, from the Chicago Cubs.

Cashman said the Yankees also had been invited to meet in California with Roki Sasaki, the heralded 23-year-old Japanese pitcher who can sign with Major League Baseball clubs from Jan. 15-23.

"I'm just happy we have an opportunity," Cashman said. "Extremely talented, no doubt about it, has a chance to be one of the world's great pitchers. Be nice to be able to have Yankee Stadium be his home."

Because he is under 25, Sasaki is treated by MLB as an international amateur and subject to signing bonus pools for minor league contracts usually allocated to 16-year-old Latin American prospects. Teams have amounts ranging from roughly $7.6 million to $4.1 million they can spend, and the Yankees are capped at around $5.3 million.

Bellinger's father signed with the Yankees in November 1996 and played for the big league team from 1999 to 2001, winning two World Series and three American League pennants. Cody turned 6 in his father's last season in pinstripes.

"Someone that wants to be here," Cashman said, a remark that some may read as aimed at Soto. "I've been hearing it for a long time, including his agent, Scott Boras, saying, `Can you get him over here? He's driving me crazy. He wants to be a Yankee.' But that's not why I did it. Ultimately I did it because it's a fit."

AP

New York Yankees general manager Brian Cashman speaks during a baseball news conference about Max Fried, Wednesday, Dec. 18, 2024, in New York.

Bellinger could play outfield or first base depending on other moves the Yankees make.

"There's different ways of doing it," manager Aaron Boone said. "You're never going to have the perfect team and you'd never know going into an offseason what you're going to be able to do, whether it's hammering a strength, whether it's plugging a hole. It's kind of where the market and the matchups happen. And so far, I think the moves that we've made I'm really excited about. ... I feel like the winter's to this point been a good one."

Bellinger is guaranteed $52.5 million for the next two seasons. The left-handed-hitting 29-year-old has a $27.5 million salary for next year and a $25 million player option for 2026 with a $5 million buyout.

"Honored to wear the pinstripes, ready and excited to get to work!!" he wrote on Instagram.

Chicago agreed to send the Yankees $5 million: $2.5 million next Sept. 1 and if the option is exercised, five payments of $500,000 on the first of each month from May through September in 2026. If the option is declined, the Cubs would pay the Yankees $2.5 million on Jan. 15, 2026.

Bellinger batted .266 with 18 homers and 78 RBIs in 130 games this year, sidelined between April 23 and May 7 by a broken right rib. He had a 1.035 OPS in 2019 when he was picked for his second All-Star team and won the NL MVP award with the Los Angeles Dodgers. It has been above .800 once in the last five years.

"I do feel like offensively speaking, he'll play up in our yard and he's still a young man and a really good athlete," Boone said. "So you always hope for the ultimate upside but at the very least I know we're getting a really valuable player."

Boone spoke with Bellinger on Tuesday night.

"He's like, `By the way, don't worry about where you play me. I'll play wherever. Wherever you need me that night, whether it's center, left, first, whatever it may be,'" Boone recalled.

Williams will become the Yankees closer, and Boone and pitching coach Matt Blake said they both assured Luke Weaver he will have a prominent role.

TMS

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knowledge, skill, and heart for the game this season as well.

HMS, though, had redemption on their minds after they fell to TMS in the finals of the slow pitch league—and gave TMS a run for their money in this season's finals.

They were tied, 7-7, in the sixth inning as HMS rallied from a 2-5 deficit. Jesse Santos, Eric Palacios Jr., Caleb Cabrera, Preston Santos, and K.C. William all scored to tie it up.

But TMS leadoff batter, Damian Marchadesch, did what he was supposed to do and got on base, then eventually scored for an 8-7 game. Teammate Justin Garde also rounded the bases to put them up by two, 9-7 at the end of the sixth.

The Hilitais could not make it happen in the last inning as they left runners on base and the TMS sluggers celebrated their second softball championship.

The Tatagas are made up of Damian Marchadesch, Damian Sablan, Dayton Marchadesch, Derrence Benjamin, Donovan Johnson, Dyson Danis, Jesus San Nicolas, Justin Garde, Kayden Lizama, Peter Camacho, Chance Sablan, Taylon Appleby, Brayden Otiwii, Joaquin Cangco, Zekiel Falig, Carl Hocog, Leon Neth, and Fransid Santos.

TMS head coach Neil Camacho, who also coached the slow pitch team, said that their season is fantastic. "Our boys are still full of energy and itching to get back out there. It was amazing to see all the other schools bring their best to the field, and the competition was truly exciting," he said.

With how they felt to win the title to wrap up an undefeated season, he said, "An undefeated season is the dream for every athlete, and our boys worked tirelessly—both during practices and in games—to maintain their title as champions. It's a testament to their hard work, discipline, and team spirit. Achieving that perfect season, 9-0, feels incredibly rewarding!"

For the finals against HMS, he said, "It felt like déja vü! Facing off against HMS again at the end of the season really brought everything full circle. HMS gave us a tough fight, and playing three games back-to-back shows the heart and grit of those boys. It was an intense and thrilling series. Seeing familiar faces at the top going for the title really reminds us of the fierce competition and how far we've all come."

The finals round, he said, was incredible. "It was great to see the [Dr. Rita Hocog Inos Jr./ Sr. High School] Bucks out there doing their thing. They played hard, and we really respect their effort. Looking ahead, we hope to see the Tinian [Jr. High School] Stallions join in the mix next year. Inter-island games are always a highlight, and they really showcase the spirit of inter-scholastic sports—sportsmanship, teamwork, and a lot of fun on the field."

He then gave thanks and said a huge shoutout to his boys for their dedication and commitment throughout the season. "I'd also like to thank all the parents, guardians, families, and sponsors for their ongoing support. And, of course, I couldn't have done it without my incredible coaching team—Mr. Adam Salila, Mr. Kennedy Benjamin, Mr. Andave Marchadesch, and our Dugout Mom, my wife, Mrs. C.J. Camacho. You all played a huge role in making this season a success. Thank you!"

TRIBUTES

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their league next year.

In a statement by the Saipan Little League on Camacho's passing, they said, "On behalf of the Saipan Little League, we offer our deepest condolences to the family, children and life partner Pearl Babauta Castro in the passing of former representative and long-time Little League manager, coach, and volunteer, Mr. George Camacho. He was a staunch advocate for youth baseball in the CNMI. Over the years, he brought many all-star teams to the Little League district and regional tournaments. His presence will be deeply missed."

They added, "As we are all aware, the Saipan Little League was not able to put together a playing season this year. Just this past summer, George was asked to conduct a youth baseball summer league, and without hesitation, knowing that his health was failing, he stepped up to the plate and made it happen. His dedication to the sport and his commitment to teaching our youth baseball is unparalleled and deeply admired."

Camacho's younger brother, Vincent Camacho Jr., who is an NSA member, said, "George is best remembered for his love and dedication to public service and to our local community, especially to the youth. He worked for the people of the CNMI all his life, and he has been a part of community youth groups and organizations throughout his career."

CNMI standout national baseball team pitcher Josh Jones said Camacho was his longtime coach.

"Coach George mentored me since I was 11 years old and made a big impact not only to me but also the youth from Tanapag and the whole north side of the island. He made every youth enjoy the game of baseball which is the bread and butter for the whole village all the way up until this day that also made us the best we can be off the diamond field. Coach George is not here with us but for sure we will make him proud to continue to develop the youth for him. The Braves have been a member of the Saipan Little League of youth baseball in the CNMI for a long time because of coach George. A lot of our kids like myself have gone through the program thanks to him."

The former CNMI representative is survived by his wife Pearl B. Castro, his children, his siblings, and grandmother, Julia K. Norita.

His parents were the late Vicente Tudela Camacho and the late Marcella Norita Camacho.

NSA

Long-time coach/manager, late George N. Camacho, far left, poses with the NSA Braves Saipan Baseball League team at the Francisco "Tan Ko" Palacios Baseball Field.

NMIFA

Golden Boot Award winners MP United's Quido Jambor, right, and Kanoa's Aldric Antonio pose with their trophies during the awards ceremony of the TakeCare Youth Soccer League Fall 2024 last Saturday at the NMI Soccer Training Center in Koblerville.

MP

From page 24

loss standing in the playoffs.

In a gripping finale, the thrilling contest unfolded and showcased the U12's top teams vie for the championship once again.

The Typhoons, made up of Beau Bauer, Quido Jambor, and Mateo Angeles, Jiade Benson, Reide Benson, Guy Pudney, Kanoa Owens, Takara Hatamata, Evan Poole, Antonio Heras, Damien Camacho, Xavier Camacho, and Jose Tenorio, worked as one unit and came out on top against a strong Kanoa team.

The game's lone goal came just three minutes in by an aggressive attack at the net courtesy of Beau Bauer. The match's first three minutes was the defining moment as MPU retained the lead, with Kanoa unable to penetrate MPU's tight defenses throughout.

The Golden Boot Award went to both Quido Jambor of MPU and Kanoa's Aldric Antonio with 14 goals each,

In third place was Matansa FC after they beat Shirley's FC, 2(2)-2(0).

Lillard, Antetokounmpo won an NBA Cup together.

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Saipan Tribune
Sports

Yankees moved on quickly after losing Soto; Sasaki could be next.

PAGE 23

TMS sluggers are undisputed fastpitch champs

By LEIGH GASES
leigh_gases@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO
Champions Tanapag Middle School Tatagas pose for a group photo during the awards ceremony of the Inaugural PSS-NMI Softball Association Interscholastic Boys High School Fast Pitch Softball League 2024-2025 last Saturday at the Capitol Hill Softball Field.

It was déja vü all over again as the sluggers of the north at Tanapag Middle School etched their dominance once more in the bat and ball sport—this time in the Inaugural PSS-NMI Softball Association Interscholastic Boys High School Fast Pitch Softball League 2024-2025 with a championship win last Saturday at the Capitol Hill Softball Field.

They bested archrivals from the south side, Hopwood Middle School, 9-7, to clinch the title—just as they did with the Inaugural SBL-PSS Interscholastic Boys Middle School Slow Pitch Softball League 2023-2024 season last January.

Most of the players in this fast pitch team were also the players from the slow pitch championship team and they brought with them their

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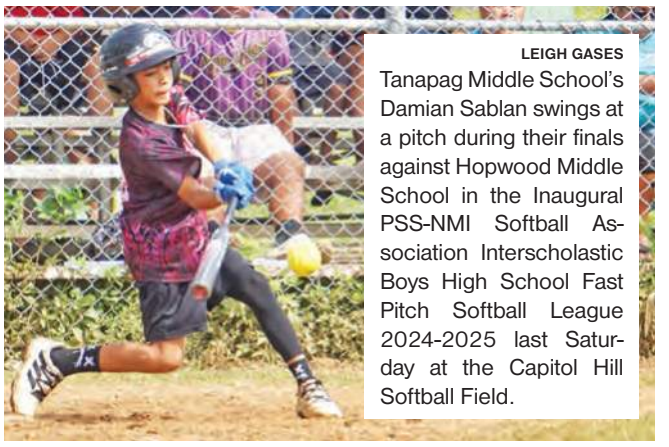

LEIGH GASES
Tanapag Middle School's Damian Sablan swings at a pitch during their finals against Hopwood Middle School in the Inaugural PSS-NMI Softball Association Interscholastic Boys High School Fast Pitch Softball League 2024-2025 last Saturday at the Capitol Hill Softball Field.

LEIGH GASES
Tanapag Middle School's Justin Garde reaches for a ground ball during their finals against Hopwood Middle School in the Inaugural PSS-NMI Softball Association Interscholastic Boys High School Fast Pitch Softball League 2024-2025 last Saturday at the Capitol Hill Softball Field.

Tributes flow in for NSA co-founder George N. Camacho

By LEIGH GASES
leigh_gases@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Tributes continue to flow in for the late George N. Camacho who passed away earlier this week.

He was the co-founder and chairman of the Natibu Sports Association as well as the longtime coach/manager for the baseball team Braves and CNMI All-Star baseball teams.

Camacho's contributions on and off the field were vast and he was a prominent figure in the sport of baseball, touching the lives of countless young athletes through his coaching and mentoring.

NSA, which he helped in founding and also served a term as president, came up with their motto, "Cover home," which means protecting the community from alcohol, drugs, and other bad habits through baseball and other sports.

NSA, in a statement said, "Hopefully his contributions to the sport will be remembered. His goal was to bring youth baseball back and this year, NSA held a youth baseball season, and now Saipan Little League is forming for 2025."

"He will be missed by NSA, [Saipan Baseball League], and all his fellow coaches and former players," said NSA.

NSA said that they plan to dedicate the 2025 Little League season to Camacho and will field three Braves teams in the majors, juniors, and seniors division.

Camacho also served as vice president for the Saipan Little League. He was a strong advocate in bringing youth baseball back to the CNMI after years of hiatus, and it was welcome news when the Saipan Little League recently reformed and announced the return of

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NSA
Long-time coach/manager, late George N. Camacho, far left, poses with the NSA Braves Jr. league team at the Capitol Hill Softball Field.

MP United repeats as U12 champs

NMIFA
Champions of the U12 division, MP United Football Club, pose with their medals and trophy during the awards ceremony of the TakeCare Youth Soccer League Fall 2024 last Saturday at the NMI Soccer Training Center in Koblerville.

By LEIGH GASES
leigh_gases@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

The future of soccer is bright as the young, up-and-coming soccer stars from the MP United Football Club secured the U12 boys division title for a repeat after they beat rivals Kanoa FC 1, 1-0, in the TakeCare Youth Soccer League Fall 2024 last Saturday at the NMI Soccer Training Center in Koblerville.

MPU Typhoons won the TakeCare Youth Soccer League Spring 2024 championship—with almost the same roster as this season. The Typhoons blew through the regular season with an undefeated 6-0 win-loss record, and held a 2-1-0 win-draw-

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